

PLUCK AND LUCK

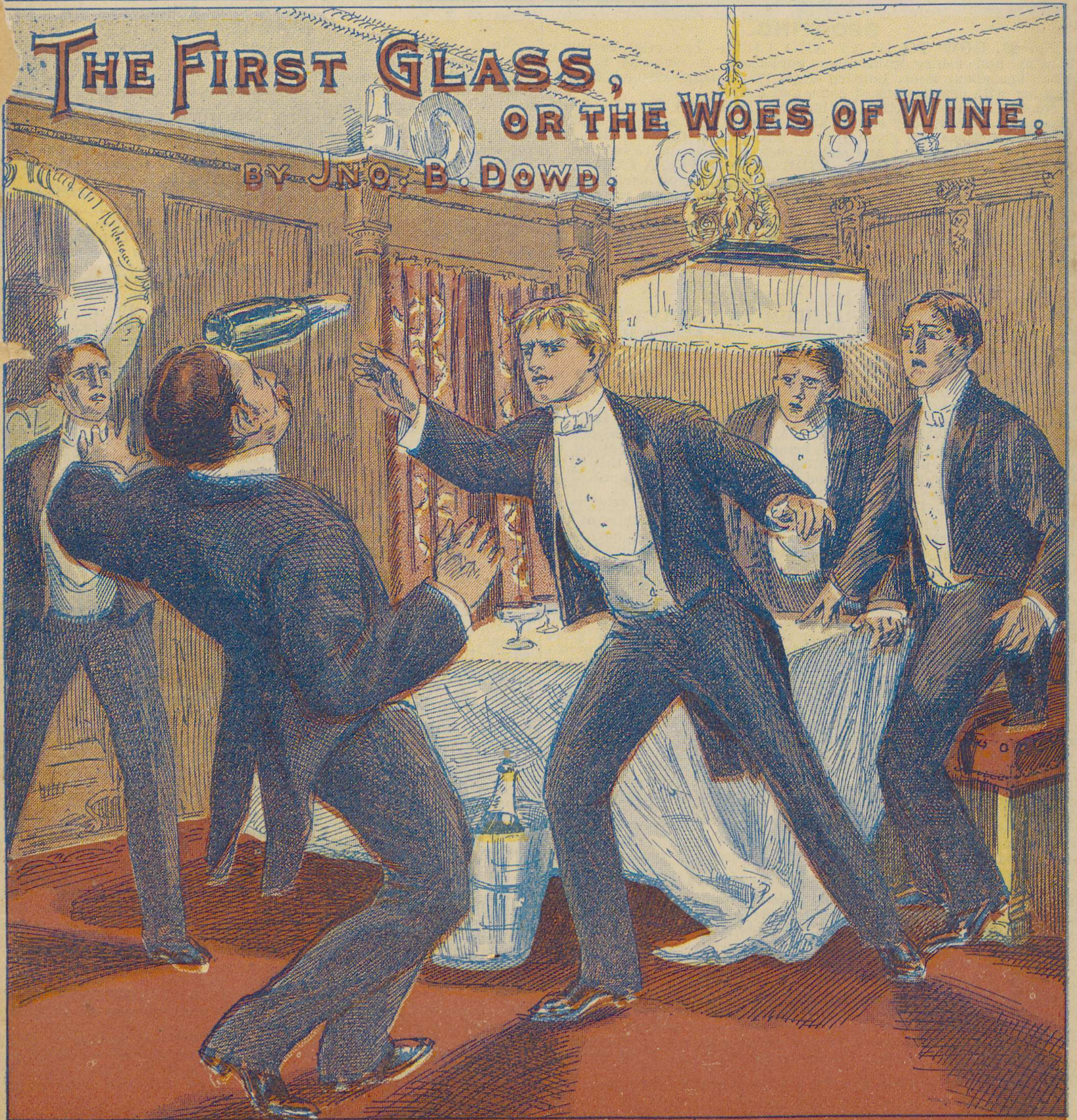
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Price 5 Cents.



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No. 77.

NEW YORK, November 22, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

THE FIRST GLASS;

OR,

THE WOES OF WINE.

A STORY OF FOUR FRIENDS.

BY JNO. B. DOWD.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOUR FRIENDS.

On a lovely afternoon, several years ago, four young men, members of the senior class in old Columbia College, were seen leisurely strolling down Broadway, arm-in-arm, smoking fragrant Havanas and chatting gaily on passing events. There was nothing odd or peculiar about any of them to attract particular attention from passers-by. They were well and neatly dressed, and all were good-looking—perhaps about the average of young men, and therefore were eyed kindly by many ladies on the street as they passed.

"I say, fellows," said the tallest of the party, "this is interesting, but very dry. I move that we go in somewhere and have a bottle of champagne."

"You are a philosopher and hero, Eugene," said Robert Brinsley, "and I will follow in your footsteps. Blessed is he who setteth a good example, Selah!"

"Woe unto him who putteth the bottle to his neighbor's lips!" said Harry Delmar, a handsome, black-eyed, curly-mustached young man. "I will not drink with you, Casserly."

"Oh, we will excuse you, Delmar, because you have never been known to drink anything stronger than milk. It's a wonder you were ever weaned."

"It's a pity you were weaned, Casserly," retorted Harry Delmar, good-naturedly, "for your diet is not good for you. I recommend you to use milk exclusively until your unnatural thirst is assuaged."

"Milk is for babes," retorted Casserly. "But say, Morley, you will join us, of course?"

"Well, no," replied Guy Morley, slowly. "I think it's best not to drink wine, or anything else that can intoxicate."

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" exclaimed Robert Brinsley, interrupting Guy. "A new convert, as I live! I'll wager a basket of Heidsieck that I can name the day and

hour of his conversion! 'Pon my soul, but woman is the best missionary after all."

"Ha! a romance!" exclaimed Eugene Casserly. "There's a woman in it. Out with it, and I charge you, Brinsley, to speak the truth in all soberness."

"That I will if I perish in the attempt," replied Brinsley, with a melo-dramatic air that made the other roar. "'Twas on a Wednesday night, at the house of Ellington, the merchant. There were many lovely women there, and our hearts were made glad with the bright smiles we did receive from them; and behold, the man Guy, whose surname is Morley, did talk with the daughter of the house in a corner. In the course of the conversation she said:

"I detest wine and liquor, and the man who drinks them can never be a friend of mine."

"From that hour the man Morley hath drank no wine, but spitteth cotton all the day long."

This quaint relation of the story, and the evident confusion of Guy Morley, set the others in a roar again. They laughed so immoderately that a policeman politely warned them to be less boisterous on the street.

But Harry Delmar, after the laugh subsided, seemed a little troubled in his mind about something. He looked serious.

"Behold now, the green-eyed monster cometh. The man Harry, whose surname is Delmar, liketh not the teetotal motive of his friend. The drinkers of milk and cold water will no longer dwell together in unity."

This sally of Brinsley's restored the good humor of Harry, and he laughingly said:

"The work of the mischief-maker shall come to naught," and ran his hand through Guy's arm.

"I say, Harry," said Guy, "we will work the police so as to keep them out of the lockup, eh?"

"Yes. It's a pity to allow such jolly fellows to be locked up even if they do make beasts of themselves," replied Harry,

and Casserly and Brinsley turned away to enter a fashionable saloon without replying to the remark.

Harry Delmar and Guy Morley walked down Broadway, arm-in-arm, like the best of friends.

"Is it true, Guy?" Harry asked, "that you are not going to drink any more?"

"Yes. I've had enough of the headaches in the morning."

"Madge is an out and out teetotaler, isn't she?"

"Yes, and a brave one, too. If all the young ladies were like her there would be much less drinking done by young men."

"Did she influence you in your decision to drink no more?"

"Well, I don't know that she did," was the hesitating reply. "She may have strengthened me some. Any pretty girl could do that, you know."

Harry Delmar looked troubled again, but made no reply.

"Why do you ask?"

Harry looked up quickly into Guy Morley's face, as if he would read the thought that prompted the question. But Guy's face was a sealed book to him then. He could not interpret the meaning of his expression.

"Because I am glad you have come to that conclusion," said Harry. "You know I have often spoken to you about it."

"Yes, I know you have, but I never thought much about it before. I say, Harry, I have an engagement at Sarony's this afternoon. Will you go up and wait for me?"

"No, I believe not. I will walk further down the street, and meet you at the hotel at five."

Guy Morley entered Sarony's and Harry Delmar continued his stroll down Broadway.

"Ah, Madge Ellington," murmured Harry to himself, "you have another kneeling at your shrine, and he is my friend. But you have given me your love, Madge, and I will trust you. I am sorry if Guy has placed his affection there, but I cannot tell him of the engagement."

Harry continued his stroll until he reached Twenty-third street, where he suddenly met face to face with a lovely young lady—the very one who was uppermost in his thoughts—Madge Ellington.

"Why, Harry Delmar!" she exclaimed, in her pretty feminine way. "How you startled me!"

"I am so glad we have met, dear Madge," said Harry, confidently, as he took her unresisting hand and drew it through his arm, thus appropriating her to himself with an air of proprietorship. "I have some news for you."

"Indeed! Pray tell me at once, then, and don't keep me in suspense, for I never could endure it."

"Well, you have made a convert to temperance," said Harry.

"Who in the world is it?"

"Guess."

"Oh, how provoking! I never could guess, though I hope it is that tall Eugene Casserly, as he needs conversion in that direction about as much as any one I know."

"No—I wish it was, for he is the one who leads the whole class into drinking-places."

"Who is it, then? Don't keep me in suspense."

"It is Guy Morley."

Madge Ellington opened wide her great brown eyes and stared at her companion.

"What did you say to him, Madge?" Harry asked.

"Oh, I repeated the old couplet to him to the effect that:

"The lips that touched wine,
Could never touch mine,"

and he said he would never drink again. But I didn't think he really meant it."

"He does mean it, for he frankly refused to drink with Casserly and Brinsley just now, and bravely withstood all their jeering."

"I am so glad to hear it," said Madge.

"But, Madge, he is in love with you," said Harry.

Madge turned pale and looked up into Harry's face.

"No—no, not that!" she said.

"I am sure of it, Madge."

"He has never shown it to me by either word or action."

"You will not encourage him then?"

"No. I shall treat him as I have treated your other two friends—kindly, and as a lady should always treat a gentleman. You are not jealous, Harry?"

"Oh, no, but—but—I—love you so, Madge, that I can not bear to have another love you!"

"Harry, how much do you love me?" and she leaned heavily on his arm, and looked up into his face with a tender, loving gaze that would have melted the heart of an anchorite.

"Give me a rule by which to measure one's love, and I will try to tell you, darling," he replied, pressing the little hand that nestled so confidently on his arm.

"How can I? There is no rule that I know of. But you could tell me if you would;" and there was a loving pout about those cherry lips that would have tempted Harry to kiss them were they anywhere else than on a public street.

"My darling, the height, depth and breadth of my love is immeasurable. You are more precious to me than life, for without your love life itself would not endure."

"Will you always love me thus, Harry?" she murmured.

"Yes. My love will grow stronger with time, if you never change. Of course, if you grew cold and indifferent, I suppose I would do likewise."

"Do all lovers talk as you do, Harry?"

"Why, what a question! Why do you ask such a question, Madge?"

"Because so many men, when they marry, leave their wives and visit club rooms, where they drink with boon companions, and return home drunk, to break their wives' hearts, if not their heads."

"Madge, I have yet my first glass of wine to drink," said Harry, with injured innocence.

"And you will never—never drink it, Harry, dear?"

"Never—never, Madge!" replied Harry; "but you don't fear it, do you?"

"Sometimes I tremble for you, because Eugene Casserly and Robert Brinsley are your classmates, and you are such friends. They may persuade you to drink wine with them sometime."

"We have been together now about four years," said Harry, "and have been boon companions all that time, yet they have not been able to tempt me. Ah! Madge, if I forget my promise to you and drink of the intoxicating cup, drive me from your presence, and cease to love me as one utterly unworthy."

"Oh, Harry, that would be terrible, but I could not love you if you drank. My poor aunt died of a broken heart because her husband was a drunkard."

"That was horrible indeed."

"Yes, and it has made an impression upon my mind which can never be effaced. Will you come in?"

"Thank you, I cannot. I have engaged to meet Guy at five."

"You will call to-morrow evening, of course?"

"Yes, certainly," and Harry Delmar left the charming Madge Ellington on the stoop of her father's elegant mansion on Thirty-fourth street, and turned toward Broadway again.

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN IN THE CASE.

The reader has doubtless ascertained, ere this, that Harry Delmar, Guy Morley, Eugene Casserly and Robert Brinsley, members of the senior class of Columbia College, were bosom friends in every sense of the term. They were all four members of quite wealthy families residing in other states, whose indulgent fathers provided them liberally with money while attending college.

They were known among all their acquaintances as the "inseparables," as they attended parties, receptions, balls and entertainments in a body.

Casserly, Brinsley and Morley were given to wine drinking quite freely, and sometimes took too much, as all men do who drink. But Harry Delmar had thus far successfully resisted every temptation to drink, though he was a boon companion in all their adventures about town.

This sturdy resistance of temptation attracted and commanded the admiration of Madge Ellington, the daughter of a very wealthy merchant, and the belle of Thirty-fourth street. Her admiration ripened into a warm friendship, which finally mellowed into love and engagement.

Guy Morley also became enamored of her, but kept his passion concealed while doing all in his power to gain her love.

Harry Delmar never suspected his passion for Madge until Robert Brinsley's comical relation of his conversion to total abstinence.

The reader has seen how Harry stands with Madge; with Guy it was different.

As he ascended to the parlors of Sarony, the distinguished artist, after parting with Harry on Broadway, Guy muttered to himself:

"I would give my right arm to know how he stands with Madge Ellington. She is such a skilful diplomat that one can draw nothing from her she does not wish known. I know she likes him for his unswerving temperance principles, for she is an uncompromising teetotaler herself. If he would only break his pledge and drink, I know I could have some chance to win her. She will hear of my refusal to drink any more, and that will be greatly in my favor. Oh, Madge Ellington, I would sell my soul to win your love! I would sacrifice everything—my best friend—to win and call you mine! Harry Delmar shall drink his first glass, and you shall hear of it. If he falls I will rise, and you shall yet be mine."

To what length will not the wild throbbing heart of man go in its mad chase of its idol?

Guy Morley was as true, perhaps, in his friendship for Harry Delmar, as any other man could have been under similar circumstances.

He sat for his picture, and then went out to wend his way back to the hotel where he had engaged to meet Harry at five o'clock, which was their regular dinner hour.

On his way he came across Casserly and Brinsley, who were in the highest spirits from having finished a bottle of champagne between them.

"Ah, Morley, old fellow!" exclaimed Casserly, "I am sorry for you. You should have been with us. Such generous wine as we did have. You are not the man for a cold water diet. You will die of dropsy if you don't drop it."

"Now, see here, fellows," said Morley, "some people act without motive. I never do. I think my head is level. You keep your chaff to yourselves and watch. Brinsley, you gave me away badly, but I'll heap vengeance on you for it. Just wait and see."

"Of course you will have a drink with us, then?" said Casserly.

"Indeed I will not, and you cannot shake me. But if you will induce Harry to drink just one glass of wine, I'll put up the best champagne supper that Delmonico can manipulate."

"Oh, the schemer!" exclaimed Brinsley.

"I never bet but what I try to win, so ask no questions, and get the supper if you can."

"I'll do it," said Casserly, with a positive enthusiasm, "and stick you one hundred dollars for the supper."

"Go in and win, lemons!" exclaimed Brinsley, laughing good-naturedly, as they all three turned toward the hotel together.

The four friends met at the dinner table, and conversed with their old-time friendship as they discussed the meal. The

conversation turned on the reception at the Ellington mansion on the morrow night, to which they had invitations.

"I met Miss Madge this afternoon, Guy," said Harry, "and told her of your conversion to her theory of temperance."

"You did? What did she say?"

"She was very much gratified, and thinks you did a wise and noble thing. She'll congratulate you to-morrow night."

And so she did.

At the reception, as soon as the four friends entered, and she had greeted and welcomed them, Madge Ellington took Guy Morley's arm, and strolled out into the conservatory with him.

"Yes, Miss Madge," he said, "I have vowed never to touch another drop of wine as long as I live. You impelled me to that decision, for I never dreamed that the ladies felt so strongly about it until I heard what you said."

"I am truly glad I said it, then," said she, "for I know I shall be the happier for it."

Unfortunate words!

Guy Morley misinterpreted her meaning, and lingered by her side until Harry Delmar was nearly crazy with suspense and jealousy.

Every young lady feels flattered in having made a conquest, and knowing that Guy Morley was a worshiper at her shrine, Madge Ellington was exceedingly tender and gracious to him.

At last she was forced to leave him in response to her duties as the daughter of the hostess, and Guy Morley was left to his own reflections.

"She likes me as much as she does Delmar," he muttered to himself, as he gazed after her, "and if he were only out of the way or would only forfeit her confidence by drinking wine. Oh, she is worth sacrificing a kingdom for!"

In his mad race for her hand Guy Morley was sinking himself in a cesspool of moral infamy. Yet he was the boon companion of Harry Delmar!

At a late hour the four friends returned to their hotel, each pleased with the enjoyment of the evening. Harry Delmar had received assurances of Madge Ellington's love, and was happy. Guy Morley had misinterpreted Madge's words to him, and was also happy. Casserly and Brinsley had talked nonsense with a dozen pretty girls, and were also pleased with themselves.

Two weeks later and the four friends had graduated with high honors from Columbia College, and received the congratulations of their friends and acquaintances in the city.

They had all four chosen a profession—three to study law and one that of medicine. Each had made engagements with eminent members of those professions to enter upon their studies in their offices within a month after leaving college.

"I am glad you are to remain in the city, dear Harry," said Madge, the next day after his graduation.

"So am I, as we can be near each other," he replied.

"Yes; the thought makes me happy. Will any of the others remain?"

"Yes, Brinsley is going to study medicine, while Casserly, Morley and myself will study law."

"Why, you four are indeed 'inseparables,'" laughed Madge.

"Yes, it seems so. I never heard of four young men who got along so amicably as we do," and Harry smiled pleasantly as he spoke of his friends. "We are to have a supper to-morrow night at our hotel in honor of our graduation, and to cement a covenant of perpetual friendship."

"Why, how pleasant that will be! How I wish I could join you all there. But of course a lady would be out of place there."

"Yes, rather. There may be some other members of the class there, though I am not certain of that till I see Casserly."

"I hope you will have a pleasant time, and think of me," said she, as he was about to leave.

"You are never out of my mind, dear Madge. I think of you by day and dream of you all night."

Harry went away with a light heart.

But Madge Ellington was troubled about that proposed supper.

"Casserly and Brinsley will have wine there," she murmured, "and there is no telling what the consequences will be. I do not fear for Harry, but poor Guy Morley may not be able to resist the temptation. I declare it is a shame that men will expose the weak to such dangerous temptations."

The next day was spent in preparation for the supper. Everything was under the direction of Eugene Casserly and Robert Brinsley, both of whom had had some experience in such things.

When the time came for them to sit down to the table, they found it loaded down with good things—a feast fit for a king.

CHAPTER III.

THE SUPPER, AND HARRY'S FALL.

The good things on the table were discussed with real appetizing gusto, and the flow of conversation was incessant, interrupted only by the rattle of knives and dishes as the four friends did ample justice to the rich viands.

Casserly presided, and directed everything with admirable tact and skill.

At last, when they had eaten their fill, Casserly arose and addressed his three comrades and classmates.

"Friends and comrades," he said, "four years ago, when we were younger than we are now, and much more ignorant of the world, we met for the first time within the sacred walls of dear old Columbia. We drifted together, and have never separated since that meeting, but have been inseparable friends. We have threaded together the devious pathways that lead to the Temple of Knowledge, and now we stand at the foot of the grand staircases. Let us pledge ourselves, for the sake of our past friendship and the bright hopes of the future, to remain true to each other—to aid and defend each through weal or woe—and be the friends we have ever been. In deference to Delmar and Morley's strict temperance principles, I have directed that we have no wine on the table to-night, but have sparkling cider instead, knowing that they would not fail to appreciate the concession, and meet us half way in brimming bumpers to our covenant of perpetual friendship."

This speech was greeted with applause by the others, even Harry Delmar joining heartily in it, for he regarded it as a victory gained in the cause of temperance.

"Words cannot express my gratification," he exclaimed, springing to his feet, "that at last we can sit down at a table without any wine before us. You will now see that wine is not at all necessary to good fellowship. Bring on your cider, and I will join you in as many glasses as you choose to drink."

Of course the others applauded Harry, and the bottles of "cider" were produced—regular quart champagne bottles. Harry took up one of them and read the label—"pure sparkling cider"—and set it down again.

"I am sorry, fellows," said Guy Morley, after a pause of several minutes, "that I cannot drink with you, as my physician put me on a course of medicine this morning and absolutely prohibited me from drinking anything but tea or milk—not even cold water being allowed. I am quite sure that I have committed an error in eating so heartily as I have. But I will pledge you all the same in a glass of milk."

They voted to excuse Morley, and then Casserly proceeded to draw the first cork of the evening and fill the glasses of Brinsley and Delmar.

"Here's to our future!" exclaimed Brinsley, holding his glass above his head. "May it be as prosperous and glorious as our past has been pleasant. Drink!"

"Bravo! With all my heart!" exclaimed Casserly, quaffing his glass with relish. Brinsley and Delmar emptied their glasses also.

"That's the first time I ever tasted cider," said Harry, setting his glass down. "The taste is not bad. I really like it."

"There is no more harmless drink, my dear fellow," said Casserly. "Fill up, and let's have another toast!"

The glasses were filled, and Casserly held his aloft, as he said:

"In this sparkling beverage we mutually pledge eternal friendship, the ties of which can be severed only by death."

"Amen!" exclaimed Brinsley and Morley; and they all drank, Morley confining himself to milk.

Casserly then proposed a song from Brinsley. He agreed, for he had a fine voice, and loved music. He rendered "Annie Laurie" with fine effect; after which they drank another brimming glass of the "cider."

By this time Harry Delmar's face was flushed and his eyes shining like coals. He was growing boisterous and reckless, and wanted to have another song.

Casserly sang "The Last Rose of Summer," which they applauded, and then drank to another toast which Guy Morley proposed.

"That was well done, Casserly," said Harry, enthusiastically. "Fill up, and I'll give you one myself."

"A song—a song from Harry Delmar!" cried Brinsley, rapping on the table.

Harry arose to his feet and sang, holding his glass aloft:

"Here's to the girl I love, generous and gay,
Into whose bright eyes mirth seems to play;
Pretty as a picture, pure as any dove,
Here's to sweet Madge, the girl that I love."

"Delmar!" exclaimed Morley, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself for dragging that lady's name into a drinking song. Suppose somebody outside should hear you?"

"Oh, that's all right, Guy," said Brinsley. "You know Harry feels gay and lively to-night, and doesn't mean any harm."

"Oh course not," replied Morley. "But if he had confined himself to milk, as I have, he would not have done such a thing."

There was a noise at the hall door, as if a half smothered scream had escaped a woman, and then all was still again.

Let us go back a few hours in our story.

Madge Ellington had become strangely uneasy about that supper of the four friends, and had conceived the queer idea of going to the hotel and waiting in the ladies' parlor, heavily veiled, in hopes of seeing some of the revellers during the evening. She waited a couple of hours, and then hearing songs and sounds of revelry proceeding from a private parlor, where the supper was being held, she crept to the door and listened.

As she listened she heard the loved voice of Harry Delmar, singing a well-known drinking song in which he used her own name, and she knew, from his tones, that he was deeply intoxicated. She heard the manly rebuke of Guy Morley, the apology of Brinsley for him, and the declaration of Guy that he was only drinking milk himself.

Her heart was pierced as with a dagger, and a smothered scream escaped her pallid lips as she fled from the hotel.

Harry Delmar was utterly unconscious that the "cider" he had been drinking so freely was sparkling champagne, and that he was drunk. Casserly, Brinsley and Morley applauded him till he grew so exuberant that they had to use force to quiet him.

"Hands off!" he cried, struggling to his feet and flinging Brinsley aside. "Whoop! Hurrah for Columbia!"

"Keep quiet, Harry, or you'll have the police down on us," cautioned Casserly.

"Hang the police! Who's afraid of—hic—them!" he yelled.

The proprietor rushed in to quiet the noise, and Harry floored him with a bottle. The police then put in an appearance, and arrested him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIRST GLASS.

The sudden appearance of the police, and arrest of Harry Delmar, took Casserly and the others so completely by surprise that for several minutes they knew not what to do. They seemed to have lost their heads for the moment, and started helplessly at one another.

Suddenly Brinsley spoke up, and nudging Casserly with his elbow, said:

"This will never do, you know. It would ruin all of us if he is taken away by the officer."

"We mustn't let him do it," said Casserly. "I'll see him about it," and going around to where the officer was holding Delmar a prisoner, he said:

"This is all right, officer. He's a little too full, but we'll take——"

"But it isn't all right," interrupted the officer, promptly. "He's as drunk as a lord, and has knocked the landlord into a cocked hat."

"Who says (hic) I'm drunk?" asked Delmar, straightening himself up to his full height and glaring around at those about him. "Never was (hic) drunk in my life."

"Oh, no, of course not," sneered the officer, who was a cynic in such matters; "you'd tell the judge to-morrow that you never touched a drop."

"Oh, well, the judge doesn't want to see him, officer," said Casserly, slipping a ten-dollar bill into his hand. "He lives here in this hotel. Leave him to us and we'll take him right up to his room."

"Show me his room," said the officer, clutching the bill in his eager palm, "and I'll place him there myself, so as to be sure I have done my duty, and leave him there."

Casserly saw that he had gained his point, and admired the tactics of the officer. He sent for the key of Harry Delmar's room and showed the officer the way up to it.

Harry was too stupid to make any resistance, and permitted Casserly and Brinsley to take him by the arms and lead him from the top landing into his room, where the policeman left them alone with him.

"That was a narrow escape, fellows," said Guy Morley, as soon as the officer was gone.

"Yes," said Casserly. "It's worse than I bargained for. I didn't think it would go so far."

"Nor did I. We must make him believe it is all right when he sobers up in the morning."

"Never fear but that he'll hear of it from some other quarter," said Guy Morley. "I have lost a supper by it, but I am willing to stand the treat."

"Oh, I had forgotten about that supper!" exclaimed Casserly. "I'll make it cost you something, old fellow."

"All right. I am making an investment that you know nothing about."

By this time they had placed Harry in bed, and waited to see him close his eyes in sleep, which he finally did, much to their relief.

"Now, let's go down and finish another bottle," said Casserly to Brinsley, turning towards the door.

"Yes, of course. Come on, Guy."

"I'm not drinking any more, fellows," replied Morley, firmly. "I've cut the thing loose, and am going to cling to cold water till it freezes."

"Or until you die of dropsy," added Casserly.

"At any rate, I won't die of delirium tremens," retorted Guy,

and the other two turned and left him alone with Harry Delmar.

"Harry Delmar," muttered Guy, turning and gazing at the sleeper, "we are friends—have been friends for four years; but a crisis has come wherein your happiness or mine is to be sacrificed. All that a man hath will he give for his life. I love Madge Ellington dearer than life, and for her I am willing to sacrifice everything—even you, my friend. But you shall not know of the sacrifice. If she prefers me sober to you drunk, you will regard it as your misfortune and not as the result of my scheming."

He gazed long and intently at his reflection in the mirror of the dressing case, but his eyes plainly showed that his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Yes," he said to himself, "she will hear of it, and then it will be all up with him. She will think he has been playing false all the time, and that is something Madge Ellington will not forgive."

After remaining with Harry until long after midnight, for the purpose of making those in the hotel believe him the truest of Delmar's friends, Guy left him and retired to his own room.

The next morning Harry Delmar awoke with a strange feeling on him, such as he had never before felt, and wondered what was the matter with him. His head felt as though it had been enlarged to twice its natural size, and was on the eve of bursting. Everything seemed confused in his mind. He tried to think, but could not do so collectively.

"Hello, Harry!" greeted Brinsley, cheerfully, entering the room in a gay humor. "How's this? What are you lying in bed so late for?"

"Oh, my head feels as big as a bushel," groaned Harry, "and I feel sick all over. I don't know what's the matter with me."

"Oh, that's the effect of the cider you drank last night. You waded in deep, old fellow," and he gave the astonished young man a knowing wink out of the corner of his left eye.

"Will—cider—do—that?" Harry asked, slowly, in amazement.

"Yes, sparkling cider will put a head on a man equal to old Medford rum."

Harry turned as pale as death.

"Will it make a man drunk?" he asked.

"Yes, drunk as a biled owl if you drink enough of it."

"Was I drunk last night?"

"Well, no, not drunk, but you were pretty jolly, and made things lively. Oh, we had a glorious time of it, old fellow. You are not quite used to it yet, and went in too deep for a new beginner."

"New beginner!" groaned Harry.

"Yes, new beginner," repeated Brinsley; "you can't expect to keep up with old stagers like Casserly and I, you know, until you have had a few more rackets."

There was a bewildered look in Harry Delmar's eyes that would have touched a harder heart than Brinsley's, only Robert had no sympathy for such sentiments as Harry held sacred.

"I didn't know that cider would intoxicate," said Harry, mournfully, "or I would not have touched it."

"Well, it has not hurt you except in that you drank too much, that's all. It wouldn't even do that the second time."

"No—no, I'll never drink it again."

"Why, it's the very thing you want now," said Brinsley. "You've got a head on you as big as a barrel. Another drink now would clear away the cobwebs and brighten you up wonderfully."

"No—no—no. I wouldn't touch it if it would save my life!"

"The hair of the dog is good for the bite, is the old saying, you know, so you had better try it."

"Then give me a lock of your hair and Casserly's," said Harry, "for you are dogs who have bitten me, for you played me the trick."

"No—no!" exclaimed Brinsley, "you are mistaken. We knew your prejudice against wine, so we chose cider to please you."

"You intended to deceive me," said Harry, firmly, "for you knew that particular kind of cider would intoxicate, and that I was ignorant of it."

"Look here, Harry Delmar," retorted Brinsley, sharply, "how were we supposed to know that a graduate of Columbia College, in the city of New York, was such an ignoramus as not to know that a dozen glasses of sparkling cider would affect the head? Now, when you accuse us of tricking you you write yourself down an ass, that's all!" and Robert Brinsley left the room in pretended indignation, to report to Casserly the state of Harry's feelings toward them.

"Oh, I wish I knew!" groaned Harry, when left alone. "I have disgraced myself, for everybody in the hotel has heard of it, and all my friends will soon. Oh, I wish I had died before drinking that cider. If Madge Ellington should hear of it she would never forgive me, and to plead ignorance would subject me to ridicule."

He attempted to get up, but was so sick at heart, so weak in his stomach, and had such a throbbing in his head, that he fell back on the bed with a groan, and burst into tears.

It was in this condition that Guy Morley found him an hour later.

"Why, Harry, old fellow!" he exclaimed, sympathetically, "is it as bad as this? I was afraid you were drinking too much."

"Why didn't you stop me then?" Harry asked.

"I did try, and you took offense at it and I let you alone."

"I have no recollection of it."

"No, I suppose not, as you were pretty full at the time."

"Did you know that sparkling cider would make a man drunk?"

"Yes—didn't you?" Morley asked, in innocent surprise.

"No," replied Harry.

Guy Morley gave a low whistle, very expressive of astonishment.

"See here, Harry," he said, after a pause, "let 'em say you were blind drunk, and that you put a head on the landlord and threatened to clean out the house, but don't give yourself away as a blasted greenhorn. The truth is, nobody will believe that you were four years at Columbia College without finding out that sparkling cider in goodly quantities would make a man drunk. Why, man, I've been floored by it a dozen times. Everybody in New York would put you down a liar."

"Guy Morley," Harry said, looking Guy full in the face, "do you know whether or not it was a dodge on Casserly's part to make me drunk?"

"I do not," was the reply, but Morley well knew to the contrary.

"Where is Casserly?"

"I don't know."

"Will you send for a physician for me? I am very sick."

"Yes, of course I will," and Morley hastily left the room to summon a physician.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISMISSAL.

The physician came, diagnosed his case, pronounced him very ill, and prescribed medicine, and ordered careful nursing. Casserly, Brinsley, and Morley were surprised and alarmed. They constituted themselves his nurses, and faithful nurses they were. Not an hour was he left alone, one of the three being constantly by his side, day and night, and Harry was grateful to them.

His illness lasted ten days, during which time he had not heard a word from Madge Ellington.

He wanted to ask about her, but was afraid under the circumstances to do so.

On the fifth day of his illness Guy Morley called on Madge Ellington, and was astonished at finding her looking pale and sad, as though she had been ill herself and lost a near relative.

"Why, Miss Ellington!" he exclaimed, "have you been ill?"

"I have not been in my usual health," was the evasive reply.

"I am sorry to hear it. Harry Delmar is very ill at his hotel."

She raised her eyes languidly and glanced up indifferently, as she asked:

"What is the matter with him?"

"The physician thinks it is brain fever."

"I am sorry to hear it, and hope he may soon recover."

"Thanks. He will be glad to know that you expressed such a wish in his behalf."

"Indeed! I would have expressed as much sympathy for an utter stranger. I would prefer that you would not mention my name to him, Mr. Morley."

"Your wishes shall be respected, Miss Ellington," and Guy Morley saw that the subject was distasteful to her.

"I congratulate you on your faithful adherence to the pledge, Mr. Morley," she remarked, after a pause. "I've heard of your refusal to drink wine on several occasions."

"Thanks. I never made a pledge I did not keep. As soon as I became convinced that it was wrong to drink wine I vowed to drink it no more, and rather than break that pledge I would sacrifice my good right arm."

"Ah! that is the right kind of spirit. Oh, if others were as true to themselves how much happiness might be left to dwell in hearts now desolate!"

"Yes, indeed. But every man does not become as thoroughly convinced as I am, perhaps."

"No, I suppose not. I wish they were."

Morley spent an hour very pleasantly in her company, during which time she sang and played for him, seemingly as well satisfied in his company as he was in hers.

At last he went away feeling quite confident that she had heard of Delmar's fall, and that his chances were exceedingly small in that quarter.

"She invited me to call again," he muttered to himself, "and looked as if she really meant it. I wonder how she found out about Harry? She has certainly heard of it. I could see that plainly."

Poor Harry slowly recovered; and, as she had sent no message during his illness, hesitated to call on her. He lingered about the hotel, and heard enough to convince him that he had been drunk and disorderly to such an extent that the policeman had been sent for; even the landlord had talked with him about the blow that laid him (the landlord) senseless on the floor.

But at last he mustered up courage enough to call on Madge Ellington.

When she entered the parlor she found him weak and wan-looking.

"Madge, my darling!" he exclaimed, starting up and approaching her with open arms.

She recoiled from him and said coldly:

"Don't forget yourself, Mr. Delmar."

She had always called him Harry.

Her tone and manner rooted him to the spot.

He glared at her as she took a seat at the opposite end of the room from him, and gasped:

"Madge—Madge! Have you condemned me unheard?"

"No, sir, I have not," she replied, her face as pale as death itself. "I heard you say once: 'If I forget my promise to you and drink of the intoxicating cup, drive me from your presence, and cease to love me, as one utterly unworthy.' Those

were your very words. You did forget your promise, broke your pledge, and——"

She shuddered, and buried her face in her hands as if dreading to trust herself to say more.

"Yes, Madge," said Harry, slowly, "those were my very words, and by them I am willing to be judged. But you have already judged me without a hearing."

"No—no—no, I have not. I have heard!"

"But you have not heard my defense," persisted Harry.

"There can be no defense of the first glass, save moral or mental weakness, as there is then no thirst for strong drink. You were intoxicated, and sang a drinking song, into which you introduced my name."

Harry was thunderstruck. He had no recollection of singing a song on that fatal night.

"You have been misinformed, Madge," he said. "I have no recollection of singing any song."

"Mr. Delmar," she exclaimed, arising to her feet. "I heard you sing the song, and also heard Mr. Morley rebuke you like a gentleman. You will please excuse me!" and with that she turned and swept gracefully out of the room, leaving Harry rooted to the spot, almost mortally paralyzed.

"My God!" groaned Harry, dropping into a chair utterly crushed by the situation, "she has gone and has not heard me. Oh, Casserly, Brinsley, you have utterly wrecked my life!"

He sat there nearly a half hour utterly dazed, waiting, hoping, praying that she would return to the room. But the idea that she had deliberately cast him off gradually crept into his mind, and his own pride began to assert itself.

"It is all over," he muttered, rising and taking his hat. "I have nothing further in life to live for," and passed out of the house.

Out on the street he reeled like a drunken man for several blocks. His brain was on fire, and a spirit of utter desperation took possession of him.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he laughed, recklessly. "What is love? What is life? What is it all worth? Nothing. I will drink and drown remorse or sorrow, or whatever it be, and forget it all."

"Hello, Delmar!" called a familiar voice behind him, and turning, he found Casserly face to face with him. "Why, how pale you look, old fellow. You have taken too violent exercise. You need a stimulant and rest."

"Yes; drink and rest and oblivion," said Harry. "Complete the work you began. Where can we drink?"

"No—no, not now," said Casserly, quite alarmed; "that's enough for the present. Let's take a walk, and you'll feel better, perhaps."

Harry suffered Casserly to take his arm and lead him out on the street again, where the exercise and the wine soon restored a little color to his pallid face.

"You feel better now?" Casserly asked.

"Oh, yes; if I had another drink, I think I would be myself again," was the cool, reckless reply.

"Look here, Harry," said Casserly, "a drink or two always braces a fellow up. But a drink or two too many upsets him and makes a fool of him. You want to be careful about that, you know."

"No—no; I don't want to be careful," exclaimed Harry. "On the contrary, I want to drown care. I don't want even to think."

"Why, what's the matter with you, anyway, Harry Delmar?"

"Don't ask me, Casserly. Hell is within me; my brain is on fire, and my heart a heap of ashes;" and Eugene Casserly noticed a reckless glitter in his eyes as he spoke.

mild, for he was really alarmed. He persuaded Harry to accompany him back to his rooms at the hotel, and there left him, while he went in search of Brinsley and Morley, to whom he related the circumstances.

Morley went at once up to his room to see him.

To his surprise, he found him with a half-emptied bottle of champagne on the table by the side of his bed.

He looked at the bottle and then at Harry as he lay on the bed in a semi-intoxicated condition. Harry looked up and smiled faintly.

"Harry Delmar," said Guy, "this will never do in the world. You ought not to drink any wine."

"I have been drinking some of that sparkling cider," said Harry; "though it is labeled champagne, it is the same thing. I may as well complete the ruin that was begun at that supper."

"Oh, pshaw! You ought to be kicked, Harry! Why don't you get up and face the music like a man. I've been drunk a hundred times, and never let it bother me any."

"See here, Guy, did I sing a song that night?" Harry asked, with a sudden bluntness that startled him.

"Yes, why?"

"Did you say anything to me about it at the time?"

"Yes, I protested against the use you made of a lady's name in the song."

"Another question: Was Madge Ellington in this hotel that night?"

"My God, no! Who said she was?"

"She said she heard me singing that song, that's all," and Harry deliberately took up the bottle, filled a glass and tossed it off like an old stager, much to the surprise of Morley.

"Jerusalem! Did she tell you that?"

"Yes."

"Did she quarrel with you?" Morley asked.

"We are strangers now," was the reply.

Guy Morley's heart bounded up into his throat, for Harry Delmar was the only rival he feared in his wooing of beautiful Madge Ellington. He was now removed entirely and the field left open to himself.

He left Delmar to go to his own apartment.

"They have met, quarreled and parted," he said to himself, "and he is perfectly desperate over it. But what a narrow escape I made if she were really in the hotel on that night! If she heard him sing that song, she heard me rebuke him for using her name in it. My fortune is made. She'll be mine as sure as fate!"

Morley was elated beyond expression at his prospects, and at the same time sympathized with Harry Delmar in his distress of mind. With Brinsley and Casserly he consulted as to the best means to keep him from injuring himself by too much drink all at once.

"Let's take him around town on a wild tear," suggested Brinsley, "as that will amuse and tone him down."

"That's a good idea," said Casserly, "and to-night is as good a time as any other."

Immediately after supper that evening it was suggested to Harry that he go with them to several places of amusement, to which he readily assented.

They went to several places, taking a few drinks here and there—all, save Morley, who firmly refused to do so—and apparently enjoyed themselves. Harry seemed in the gayest of humor, but there was a recklessness about him that caused Casserly to watch him with unusual vigilance.

When all the theaters were out they went into a well-known sporting saloon on Broadway, where quite a number of fancy sporting characters were assembled.

Harry treated his three companions to wine. Brinsley treated to cigars, and they stood around and smoked and chatted. During a moment of carelessness Harry kicked a small dog from under him, and the next moment a burly sportsman walked up and struck him a stunning blow between the eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER—THE FIGHT.

To say that Eugene Casserly was apprehensive in regard to Harry Delmar's mental condition would be putting it very

In the twinkling of an eye Eugene Casserly floored the sport by a well-directed blow, and then the cry of:

"A fight—a fight!" resounded through the room.

Harry regained his wits about as soon as the sport did, and instantly attacked him, getting in a blow that doubled him over a billiard table. He followed it up, but another interfered, and then Casserly and Brinsley took part in it.

The sport was badly used up, for the four friends had been long taking sparring lessons from Uncle Bill Tovee, that grand old master of the "art of self defense."

The most intense excitement prevailed in the crowd, and the sporting men present threatened to eject our heroes.

"Gentlemen," said Eugene Casserly, whose blood was up, "you can't do that job. That fellow came up and struck my friend in the face without a word or action of warning, and I knocked him down. They have had a fair fight and the fellow is whipped. If any one of you, who is not a regular prize-fighter, wants satisfaction, I am ready to administer it right here and now."

The sports were nearly ten to one and refused to listen to any such a proposition. They were nearly all heated with wine, and clamored eagerly for a rush to put the four friends out.

"At 'em, boys!" cried a burly sport, and the rush commenced.

"Columbia—Columbia forever!" cried the four, seizing heavy wood chairs and flooring half a dozen of their assailants in as many seconds. Still the crowd rushed forward only to be felled by the heavy chairs. Then the crowd of enraged sports began hurling spittoons, bottles and glasses at them, making such a din that the police burst open the doors and rushed in. Howls of pain and rage filled the saloon, and a rush was made for the door, running over the police, who laid about them furiously with their clubs.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DECOY.

In the rush that followed the entrance of the police into the saloon, the four friends managed to escape, though not without a few whacks and thumps that made their heads ache for some time afterwards. But several of the others were arrested and carried to the station-house and locked up, notwithstanding their protests and assertions of innocence.

The next morning they had a formidable array of witnesses in court, to swear that they had been attacked by a gang of ruffians, and that they had only defended themselves. But their general characters were bad, and the judge relied solely upon the evidence of the policemen who made the arrests. They swore that they found four respectable-looking young men defending themselves against the combined attacks of the prisoners and a dozen others.

"Where are those young men?" the judge asked.

"They escaped, your honor," replied one of the policemen, "and we don't know who or where they are?"

The result was that several of the prisoners were fined heavily, and held until the fines were paid.

Their fines were paid, however, and they were discharged from custody. But a madder set of men were seldom met with than they were. They swore roundly that they would be revenged on the four friends.

"I know that they were Columbia College students," said one of the enraged sports, "and may I be roasted by the devil if I don't hunt them out and put 'em in a hole."

They agreed to send one of their number among the students to ascertain who the four friends were. Of course it didn't take them long to find out four such prominent characters

as our heroes, and they soon reported them to their companions.

"That fellow Casserly," said one of the sports, "is the chap that did so much mischief with that chair. I want to get a full swing at him once more. They can't remember all of us, boys, so some one of us must get in with them so as to keep us posted. We'll get 'em in hock for this racket, or my name is not Dan Kennedy."

"I'll go up there and board at the same house with them," said Joe Betts, one of the best dressed and the most gentlemanly-looking fellow in the crowd.

"Good for you, Joe! You're just the man," said Kennedy. "You cultivate 'em, while we fix up a trap for them."

"All right," said Joe. "Let me know when the trap is ready;" and Betts left the saloon to go up to the hotel where the four friends made their home.

Betts, not having been in the fracas at the saloon, was not of course, suspected by the four friends. They knew enough of the New York sports to know that they would seek some kind of satisfaction for what they had suffered at their hands in case an opportunity occurred.

Harry Delmar bore traces of the blow he had received for several days in the shape of a pair of black eyes, a fact that caused him to keep his room nearly a week. During that time he drank several bottles of champagne with his classmates in his room.

Guy Morley, however, firmly refused to touch a drop of wine, or anything else that could intoxicate, knowing that to do so would injure his chance to win the hand of Madge Ellington.

But he did not take any pains to discourage the practice of wine drinking, notwithstanding the others frequently twitted him about his abstinence.

Harry Delmar drank to drown thought. He did not want to think. The more he thought the more desperate he became, and consequently drank the deeper.

Several times was he on the point of writing to Madge and telling her the plain story of his fall, but when he remembers how she had treated him, his independence of spirit revolted at the step.

One evening Casserly came into his room accompanied by an elegantly-dressed young man whom he introduced as Mr. Betts.

"He's a jolly good fellow, Harry," said Casserly, by way of commendation.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Betts," said Harry. "Have a seat, and we'll have a bottle of wine," and Harry rang the bell for a waiter.

"Bring a bottle of wine and glasses for three," he ordered to the waiter when he responded to the bell.

The wine was produced, and all three soon disposed of it.

"You see I am in mourning," said Harry, laughing, "and can't go out much at present."

"Yes," said Betts, eyeing him critically, "how did it happen?"

"In a saloon down on Broadway the other night. We had a regular Fourth of July time of it."

"Where were the police?" Betts asked, with assumed interest.

"Oh, they put in an appearance and we adjourned for these quarters with perfect unanimity."

Betts and Casserly laughed, and drank to his speedy recovery.

"I say, Harry," said Casserly, after another glass of wine, "I thought I knew all the ins and outs of New York, but Betts here tells me of things and places that makes me feel like a green countryman. Hurry up your mourning and then we'll take it all in."

"Yes, and get taken in, too," said Harry, soberly.

"How so?"

"Those forbidden places are generally watched and pulled by the police."

"There is where you are very much mistaken, Mr. Delmar," said Betts. "They are places about which the police know nothing, and there are scores of them in the city."

"Indeed! How, then, do others know of them?"

"Through their owners, who pick out those who are discreet and are willing to pay for novelty and forbidden pleasures."

"Can anybody get into them who knows their locality?"

"The majority of them require a password, without which entrance is impossible."

"Well, that is something new," said Harry, "and I would like to see some of them. Where's Brinsley, Casserly?"

"He and Morley went out together after supper," replied Casserly, "and from the care of their make-up, I should say they had gone to call on some ladies."

Delmar turned deathly pale. He knew then where they had gone, and realized what he had lost in his fall. To drown his very thoughts he quickly filled a glass of wine and drank it off at a single turn. Casserly noticed, but did not suspect the cause of his paleness.

In another week Harry Delmar's face was clear of the effects of the blows he had received, though the effects of wine were plainly visible.

"You want some kind of excitement to enliven your spirits," said Betts. "S'pose we all go the rounds to-night and see some of those underground places I have mentioned."

"Good!" exclaimed Casserly. "I second that motion."

Brinsley and Morley also agreed, and Harry was just desperate enough to go anywhere or do anything. So it was arranged that they should go that night.

All four armed themselves before leaving the hotel, and marched arm-in-arm down Broadway. Below Fourteenth street they turned toward the great east side, where the sounds of revelry and dissipation were heard on all sides through all hours of the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

TREACHERY.

Passing along the Bowery, they saw many familiar objects and scenes that had long since lost their charms for our friends. Casserly remarked to Betts:

"You are very far from showing us anything new, Betts. So if you have anything new, trot it out."

"Yes," said Brinsley, laughing good-naturedly. "This is getting stale."

"We had to come this way, you know," replied Betts, "and I didn't want to blindfold you just to keep you from looking at stale things. Just come on, and don't look any more."

"That's good logic, anyhow," said Harry. "We'll go it blind on that."

"Not without drinks," said Brinsley, as they came to one of the numerous beer gardens in that part of the city. "Let's oil the machinery for the final trip; come in."

Brinsley led the way, and treated the party to drinks, Morley taking a cigar, but firmly refusing to drink anything intoxicating.

On the street again they crossed over to the east side, where, after going two or three blocks down, they turned into a small street which had never before attracted the attention of any of the four friends.

"What's to be seen out this way?" Casserly asked of Betts.

"Elephants," was the sententious reply. And as they had come out to see the elephant, it was perfectly satisfactory. They followed his lead like so many lambs.

Perhaps six or eight blocks were passed when Betts stopped in front of an open cellar door, and gazed down into the dimly lighted cavern. Everything about the place was dark

and forbidding. The old frame building above seemed the abode of poverty-stricken families more familiar with petty crimes than honest deeds. No one else was in sight at the moment, for it was now the hour of midnight.

"What kind of a place is this?" Harry Delmar asked, gazing down into the yawning mouth of the cellar.

"Well, it isn't a Sunday school or a prayer meeting," replied Betts, "but I've seen worse places. Let's go down and see what's going on."

"Lead the way—we'll follow," remarked Harry; and they filed down the cellar steps and disappeared in the semi-darkness beyond.

Betts seemed to be perfectly familiar with the locality, leading the way through the entire length of the cellar, which was lighted by an oil lamp with untrimmed wick and dust covered chimney.

At the further end he halted before a small door and gave seven distinct raps, which caused the door to swing open.

"Come ahead," he whispered, and entered.

Delmar was the one nearest him, and followed close on his heels, the others keeping close to him.

They found themselves in a long, narrow passage, as dimly lighted as was the cellar through which they had just passed. It had several turns, and just as Casserly was on the point of suggesting that they return Betts stopped before a door and rapped once. Two raps responded from the inside. Betts then gave five more raps and the door slowly opened, revealing a large room well lighted with kerosene lamps, and some two score or more of people of both sexes present.

Betts entered, followed by the four friends, and was greeted by a dozen or more well-dressed men and women. The latter were generally good-looking, but not very expensively dressed.

"What kind of a place is this?" Casserly whispered to Betts.

"A thieves' den," was the whispered reply; "and you must all be thieves while here, you know, just for the fun of the thing."

"But where is the fun in an honest man pretending to be a thief?" Harry Delmar asked, indignantly.

"Why, in fooling the gang. If they suspected you of not being one of them, you would never get out of here alive."

"You should have told us that before," said Brinsley.

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Betts; "I thought you wanted to see the elephant?"

"Oh, well, it doesn't make any difference, anyhow," remarked Casserly. "Let's go in and see all that's worth seeing."

To the surprise of our four friends, they found many very intelligent men and women there, who talked as freely of robberies and burglaries as stock-brokers do of their legitimate business. They drank wine, sang songs, danced and made themselves at home with an abandon that was decidedly Frenchy.

Suddenly Harry Delmar thought he saw several faces that appeared more or less familiar to him. One face particularly wore a scowl that impressed him as being decidedly malicious in its expression.

"Casserly," he whispered, soon after one of the young women, with whom he had been talking, left him, "look around carefully, and see if there are any faces here you ever saw anywhere else."

Casserly glanced casually around, and his face gave evidence of inward surprise.

"By Jove!" whispered Guy Morley to Harry, at that moment, "half the gang we licked in the Broadway saloon the other night is here."

"Exactly," whispered Harry; "and they have got us in their power. That fellow over there talking to Betts is the one who knocked me down for kicking his dog."

"Yes, and I see two fellows I floored with a chair. I wonder if Betts belongs to the gang?"

"You may rest assured he does. This is a put-up job, and we'll have trouble before we get out of here."

By this time Casserly and Brinsley had made the same discovery that Guy and Harry had.

"Just keep cool, fellows," said Casserly; "we are armed and may be able to bluff 'em if they try any game on us. Keep together, and don't let 'em surprise you in any way. Scan the floor carefully for trap doors, and be ready at a signal to draw for fight."

They kept together as closely as possible after that, declining to dance when solicited by four very pretty young women, saying:

"We are very tired, having walked a great deal to-night."

"A genuine cracksman never puts up such a flimsy excuse as that," replied one of the young women.

"A cracksman is flesh and blood like any other man," retorted Brinsley.

"Besides," added Harry, "a cracksman has his preferences in many things, you know."

"Yes, and gets 'cracked' for having them," was the significant reply.

"Let's have some more wine, fellows," said Betts, rejoining them a minute or so later.

"No," said Casserly, determinedly, "we don't wish to drink any drugged stuff here, Joe Betts," and slyly taking him by the arm, added: "Just give the right signal to open that door there, or you are a dead man! We are all armed and desperate. Any signal to your comrades will bring your death. Do you understand the situation?"

"Yes," replied Betts, in a low tone of voice, on feeling the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against his breast.

"Then remember that one minute of trifling will cause your death!" hissed Casserly, moving toward the door with him, followed closely by the others.

CHAPTER IX.

ENTRAPPED.

Betts was as pale as death as he moved toward the door, which one of the other men noticed at the time, and started toward him. He caught up with them just as they reached the door, and saw the revolver pressed against his breast.

"To the rescue! They are escaping!" he cried, and sprang back in terror as Harry Delmar covered him with his revolver.

"Stand aside!" hissed Guy Morley, aiming his revolver at the doorman's head.

The doorman stepped aside, discretion being uppermost in his mind at the moment.

"Face the gang!" said Harry, and Brinsley and Morley turned with him and faced the angry crowd of thieves.

The women screamed and rushed to a further corner of the room, while at least a dozen men drew weapons and prepared to rush upon the four daring men.

"The first man who dares interfere with our exit," hissed Casserly, "will cause the death of this man!"

"Yes, and will die also," said Delmar.

"Don't interfere, boys!" cried Betts, his face white as a sheet, as he tried to open the door.

"H—ll and furies, men!" cried one of the thieves. "If they escape we are ruined! Kill 'em!"

Bang! went a revolver, and Joe Betts fell to the floor, shot in the brain by one of his own accomplices.

"That settles it!" cried Casserly. "Shoot 'em down, fellows, as you would dogs!" and at the same time fired at the foremost one of the gang, who threw up his hands and staggered back.

Brinsley made a dash at the door and burst it open, and the next moment all four sprang through it into the narrow passage that led back toward the dimly lighted cellar, followed by a volley of pistol shots from the gang of thieves.

"Here, this way, fellows!" cried Casserly, leading the way in the dark, for the light was out, and the darkness was intense. "Feel along the wall and move fast. We can reach the street as soon as they can."

"Push ahead, then," said Guy Morley, close on his heels.

Casserly did push ahead, and the three followed him. To their surprise they were not pursued, and in a few moments they arrived at what they supposed was the door that led into the cellar.

"The light in the cellar is out," said Brinsley, as they passed through the door.

"Yes, and the street door is shut, too," added Delmar, seeing not a glimmer of light from the street side of the room.

"We must find it," said Casserly. "Come on, follow me!"

They followed in the direction of his voice; but in another moment they heard an exclamation of surprise from him.

He had run against a solid stone wall.

"Here's a wall," he said; "we can find a door by following it," and with that he ran along the side of the wall, feeling for a door as he went.

"Here's a door," said Brinsley, who had started in an opposite direction. "Wait till I examine it."

In another minute Casserly came up to him, having made the circuit of the room, and said:

"This is not the cellar. This is a small room. We are entrapped after all!"

"How know you that?" Delmar asked.

"Walk around it once and you will know for yourself."

"What's to be done?"

"Try our strength on this door."

"Well, let's to work. Push all!"

They pushed with all their united strength, but the door seemed as solid against them as the wall itself.

"We are prisoners," said Casserly, after a pause.

"But we are armed," said Guy Morley, "and can defend ourselves."

"Yes; but we can't fight hunger with our revolvers."

"They surely would not starve us to death!"

"Why not? Haven't we got their secret, and are they not sensible enough to know that it would be dangerous to them for us to get away?"

"What shall we do, then?"

"I don't know that we can do anything," remarked Casserly, "as we can't help ourselves just now."

"Let's wait and see what they will do," suggested Brinsley.

"That's sensible, seeing we can't do anything else. Have any of you a match?"

"Yes—I have several," said Brinsley; "strange we never thought of them before," and he struck a match which suddenly lighted up the dungeon-like apartment, revealing only one door and no windows. Yet the air in the room showed that ventilation had not been lost sight of in its construction.

The sight of the heavy door and solid walls filled them with dismay.

The light went out and they were again in darkness.

"We can only wait for further developments," said Brinsley, "and be prepared for any emergency. It is now long after midnight. They will show their hand in some way—perhaps their faces."

"If they do they will catch a bullet in their mouths," said Harry Delmar.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed a voice, which seemed to come through the very walls. "How is it in there, my fine fellows?"

"Come in and see!" answered Casserly, quickly.

"Oh, no. Excuse me, but we have better light in this room. Would you like to have a light in there?"

"We are not particular unless you can show us the light of your countenance."

"That you will never see, nor the light of the sun again, either!"

"I would like to wager you something on that, if you are sure of it," replied Brinsley, in a bantering tone.

"We will have your scads when you pass in your chips, so there's no use betting," replied the voice.

"Put up or shut up!" exclaimed Brinsley, "or show your face like a man, and face the music."

"Facing the music is what you will have to do, ha-ha-ha!" and the laugh died away like that of some heartless fiend.

"He is gone," said Delmar, "and we are still in their power. What shall we do now?"

"Wait," said Casserly.

"That's all we can do."

"Hush! I hear footsteps."

The sound of footsteps were heard overhead.

They listened.

Men's voices were heard in whispered conversation.

Suddenly a trap door over their heads opened and a flood of light poured down into their cell-like quarters.

"You may come out," said a voice, "if you come one by one."

"But how will we get out?" Morley asked.

"Oh, here's a ladder," and a light ladder was thrust down through the trap door to the floor.

"That's a dodge to catch and disarm us one at a time," whispered Casserly, to his comrades. "I'll run up and take a peep."

Casserly started up the ladder, and as he raised his head up through the trap door, saw several men standing ready to seize him. The man nearest to him caught him by the coat collar. He gripped him by the cravat and dropped back through the hole, bringing the astonished thief with him. Brinsley quickly seized the ladder and removed it.

"Help—help!" yelled the victim.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Casserly, "help him if you can!"

CHAPTER X.

CAPTURING A THIEF.

"Are you hurt, Casserly?" Brinsley asked, as he assisted him to his feet.

"Give me that ladder!" hissed the man whom Casserly had so unceremoniously introduced into the dungeon.

"There it is," said Morley, pointing to it with his left hand, while with his right he presented a cocked revolver at his breast.

The man looked at the revolver and then at Guy.

The light from the lamps on the upper floor still streamed through the trap-door, enabling one to see everything in the room.

"I guess you fellows don't know what you are doing," said the man, who appeared to be the leader of the gang of thieves.

"Are you quite sure that you know what you fellows are doing?" Morley asked.

"I think we do," was the reply.

"Good! I like that!" exclaimed Casserly. "You know what you are trying to do, at any rate. You are trying to fix us, now, ain't you?"

"Yes, and we have done it," was the bold reply.

"Well, maybe you have," chuckled Casserly, "but it seems to me you have fixed yourself at the same time, for you'll never get away from us alive until we are free."

"Oh, they don't count a dozen lives as anything in carrying out their revenge," said the man.

"That looks bad for you, anyhow, doesn't it?"

"We are bound by our oath to take all such chances. If it can't be helped, I will have to pass in my chips with you."

"I don't think you would be quite willing to do that," said Harry Delmar, after a pause.

"Not from choice, but necessity is an imperative law with us."

"It is the same with us, too. We wouldn't hesitate a moment to slay you before allowing you to escape. Your comrades would not compass your death to get rid of us."

"Time will convince you of your mistake, sir. You are doomed men."

"Maybe we are, but it seems to me, my dear sir, that——"

"Can't you come up, captain?" demanded a voice from above.

"No. They have me under the muzzles of two revolvers," replied the man below.

"So you are the captain, eh?" said Casserly.

"Shall we come down and help you?" came from above.

"No—you could do no good."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Casserly, "come down by all means, and we'll give him up."

Several muttered curses were heard from above, and then a consultation among them took place which lasted several minutes.

"What shall we do, captain?" was asked.

"Fight it out and make an end of it," replied the prisoner.

"Spoken like a man," said Casserly; "come down, you cowardly whelps, and let's have it out at once."

The trap-door closed with a bang, and they were left in total darkness.

Morley seized the captain to hold him.

"Strike a match, Brinsley," he said, a moment later.

Brinsley struck a match, and Morley turned to Delmar and Casserly with:

"Search him at once."

The prisoner started and turned pale, and seemed on the point of resisting.

"If you give any trouble you are a dead man!" hissed Morley, pressing the muzzle of his revolver against his breast.

Casserly and Delmar at once proceeded to search him. They found a bunch of curiously-shaped keys, some papers, letters, a dagger, and two Derringers.

"Is this all?" Delmar asked.

"Yes," was the quick reply.

"That's a lie!" said Morley; "he feels relieved that you have not found something else."

"No—no!" gasped the man, springing away like a deer.

Casserly sprang upon him and bore him to the floor, the man struggling like a demon. Morley and Delmar assisted Casserly, while Brinsley continued to strike matches that they might see how to complete their work.

They tore his clothes from him, and discovered next to his skin, in a silken belt, some papers which they judged to be the secret he was anxious to preserve. Casserly cut the belt and handed it to Brinsley, who took it, saying:

"Search him from head to toe-nail. You don't know what else you may find on him."

They continued the search and found more papers in his boots, which they likewise handed to Brinsley.

"Now gag him!" suggested Brinsley, and they took their silk handkerchiefs and proceeded to bind and gag him.

Being sure of his helplessness, they left him lying on the floor and rejoined Brinsley.

"How many matches have you left?" Casserly asked.

"Only half a dozen or so," was the reply.

"Here's a small burglar lamp," said Morley, "which I took out of his pocket. Light it, and then we can get along splendidly."

"What a lucky thing!" and Brinsley applied the match to the little wick of the dark lantern.

It threw a brilliant light in a small circle in any direction, without interfering with the surrounding darkness in the least. By its light they examined the belt. They took from it

first a paper containing a list of names of people of both sexes residing in New York city, with their places of abode.

"Good! This is the list of the gang in New York!"

"Here is the list for Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore!" exclaimed Morley, glancing over several other papers; "why, the gang extends all over the country!"

"Here are some memoranda which may give some light on our situation," said Delmar, examining a paper which seemed to be the drawing of some plan of a house, and noticing that each door was numbered, asked to look at the keys.

Brinsley handed him the keys, and Delmar examined them closely.

"There are numbers on these keys to correspond with the numbers on this diagram," he said, showing both to his companions.

"Try the bunch on the door of this room," suggested Morley, and Harry hastened to do so.

He could find no number on the door, but key after key he tried until at last he found one that opened the door.

"Ah, I have found it!" he exclaimed, in an undertone, turning to his companions.

"Let's take him along with us to show us the way out," said Brinsley.

"We can fight our way out!" Harry exclaimed, impetuously.

"Since we have the keys I suggest that we stay where we are till daylight," Casserly remarked, after a pause. "We know not what may result from our prowling about the building at this late hour. It is now past three o'clock. Two hours more will bring daylight, when the advantage will be on our side."

"I think that a good idea," added Brinsley.

They agreed to stay in the room and wait for daylight. Brinsley placed the dark lantern where the light would fall on the face of the captain of the thieves, so they could watch him.

Casserly then sat down on the floor with his back against the door, in order to prevent any surprise from that quarter.

An hour passed and not a sound was heard from any quarter. Then footsteps overhead again caused them to look up toward the trap-door and listen.

The trap-door was raised, and a voice asked:

"Anybody in there?"

"Yes, several of us," replied Harry, who was standing directly underneath it.

"Who are you?"

"We are not answering very many questions now until we know who we are talking to."

"Oh, we are policemen," was the reply. "We heard pistol shots and have been searching the building. Anybody hurt down there?"

"Not much," replied Delmar. "How many are there of you up there?"

"Only three of us. How many are there down there?"

"About two hundred," replied Casserly, quickly taking Delmar's place, "and we are very bad men in a row. Better call out the whole police force, or you'll make a failure in arresting us."

Harry and the others were astonished at his words.

"They are not policemen," he whispered to Harry. "That's a dodge to get us in their power."

"But I saw their uniforms," persisted Harry.

"That makes no difference. Hear them swearing now?"

It was their last dodge.

They were afraid to go down and attack four men who held revolvers in their hands, and knew how to use them. Their leader was also a captive, and they were at a loss what next to do.

"That was a good dodge, captain," said Casserly to the prisoner; "but it wouldn't work."

Being gagged, the leader of the gang could not reply.

"How did you know they were not really officers, Casserly?" Harry asked.

"They didn't go at it like regular policemen, and I suspected something wrong at once. In a situation like this suspect everything and everybody around, unless you know them."

"I'll be hanged if I would have suspected them," said Brinsley, after a pause.

"Of course not. They would have called us up, one at a time, and grabbed us. They have got me in this trap by treachery. But they won't get me into another one very easily."

"Daylight will soon be here."

"That will not make it any lighter in here," said Casserly.

"Captain—captain!" called a voice from above, as the trap-door was raised about a foot.

"The captain is asleep," said Casserly; "don't disturb him."

"Sleep the devil!" growled the man; "you've killed him!"

"Come down and see for yourself."

"No—no—no! You've killed the captain! Captain—captain!"

Of course the captain could not answer.

"Turn on the gas!" cried a hoarse voice above, "and let 'em die!"

The trap-door was instantly dropped, leaving the dungeon enveloped in impenetrable darkness.

A few minutes later they smelled something that reminded them of common coal gas. It grew stronger each moment.

"By Heavens, fellows!" exclaimed Harry Delmar, "they are going to suffocate us with gas!"

"Out with the keys, then, and open the door!" said Casserly.

Harry took the bunch of keys and soon fitted the right one to the lock of the heavy door, pushed it open and passed out into the passage.

The gagged prisoner on the floor rolled himself after them, groaning piteously.

"Ah, you don't want to be left, do you?" chuckled Casserly, untying his feet and assisting him to rise. "Come on, now, and show us the way out of this place."

When out in the narrow passage, Delmar closed the door softly, and then turned to follow his comrades.

"Is this the way, sir?" Casserly asked of the prisoner.

The man nodded his head, and Casserly kept on, the others following.

But instead of going toward the cellar they had passed through under the guidance of Joe Betts, they went in an opposite direction, and were soon at the door of the room where they first discovered the treachery of their guide.

"Is this the door?" Casserly asked of the captive.

A nod in the affirmative caused him to push the door, but it was locked and immovable.

"It is locked."

Another affirmative nod from the prisoner.

"Will any key on that bunch unlock it?"

Another nod.

"Try it, Harry."

Harry tried several keys and at last found one that opened it.

They passed in and had to use the dark lantern to see where they were.

"Why, this is the room where we saw so many of the rascals!" exclaimed Guy Morley, recognizing something he remembered.

Brinsley turned the dark lantern full on the face of the prisoner, and hissed:

CHAPTER XI.

THE BAFFLED THIEVES.

They listened.

The baffled thieves were swearing at their failure with forty-horse power.

"Any more trifling will cost you your worthless life, sir!"

The man made gestures that indicated he wanted speak.

Casserly untied the gag and removed it.

"Give your comrades an alarm or signal, and you die," he said.

"You have got me confused and turned around," he said, as soon as the gag was removed.

"That's a lie," said Brinsley; "you know every inch of this building and are trying to play us false. I am in favor of blowing out your brains right here, and taking our chances of getting out all right."

"Can we get out any other way than the one by which we entered?" Guy Morley asked.

"Yes, but not until two or three hours from now," was the reply.

"How is that?"

"The outer door will not be opened sooner."

"You can't open it?"

"No."

Casserly looked at him suspiciously.

"Do you want to show us the way out?" he asked.

"No—not until I know what you intend to do with me," was the frank reply of the bold thief. "I would rather die here, a violent death, than fall into the hands of the police."

"That is plainly spoken," said Casserly, "and we can understand each other now. I cannot blame you, for in either case it would, perhaps, be death to you. But on what terms will you pilot the way out of this for us?"

"Inviolable secrecy on your part, and no further molestation of myself."

"We would then be permitted to go free, but be hunted down by your gang afterward?"

"No, we would not trouble you again."

"We cannot believe you," said Casserly, "for you would not rest content with your secret in our possession. It would be unreasonable on our part to expect it. We will take our chances. You have seen enough of us to know that we are not to be trifled with. Will you show the way out?"

"No," was the blunt reply.

"All right. We will put on the gag again."

"Wait till I get a drink of wine. I am faint with thirst," and the captain of the thieves looked faint indeed.

"I wouldn't mind having something good myself," said Brinsley, throwing the rays from the dark lantern around the room.

"Where is the wine?" Casserly asked.

"Behind the bar there," and he turned in the direction of where Brinsley had noticed a small bar when they first entered the place.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DRUGGED WINE.

They turned and walked over to the bar, and the rays of light from the dark lantern revealed the rows of bottles of champagne on the shelves behind it.

"That looks like something good," said Brinsley, eyeing a pile of champagne bottles. "Suppose we have some, fellows?"

"Just what I want," remarked Casserly.

"I don't want any myself," said Guy Morley, "and I think you fellows had better let it alone. You don't know what you are drinking in a place like this."

"I guess we can stand whatever he can," remarked Casserly, smiling, "and we'll drink from the same bottle that he does. Which shall we take, captain?"

The man indicated that the champagne was all good. Casserly took a bottle, opened it by breaking the neck off, poured out a glassful for the prisoner, saw him drink it down, and then said:

"That's all right," and filled three glasses for himself, Harry and Brinsley.

"Better try some, Morley," he said.

"No," replied Guy, "I drink no more wine. Beware of that wine. You run a great risk in drinking it."

"Oh, pshaw! Let's have another bottle of it."

Casserly opened another bottle, and made the prisoner drink another glass to see whether or not it was poisoned.

He drank it down without flinching, and then Brinsley, Casserly and Delmar each quaffed briming glasses.

"You can drink it with perfect safety, sir," said the captain to Morley, as he declined again to touch it.

"I won't risk it, sir," said Guy, firmly.

"Oh, he's a teetotaler," said Brinsley, laughing.

"Yes, and henceforth a sober man," replied Guy.

"So was I once," added Harry, desperately, "and now, since I have lost all, I don't care what becomes of me. Any more in that bottle, Casserly?"

"No—it's empty."

"Now, let's see to getting out of this den," said Guy. "Delays are dangerous. When they find us gone from the dungeon they will come down on us in full force."

"I only wish they would," Brinsley said, handling his revolver in a familiar way.

"Well, I don't. A dozen desperate men are too many for four. Come, let's be going. It must be daylight by this time."

"Well, shove ahead," said Harry, moving away in a reeling condition.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Harry!" exclaimed Guy. "It can't be that you are drunk already?" and Guy took up the dark lantern and threw the light in Harry's face.

Harry rubbed his eyes and looked stupid and sleepy.

"I'm not drunk," said Harry, "but feel devilish sleepy."

"So do I," remarked Brinsley, languidly.

"And I, too," added Casserly.

Guy turned the light on the prisoner's face.

He, too, looked sleepy and stupid.

"Heaven help us!" he exclaimed. "You are all drugged! Ten thousand curses on the wine!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" chuckled the prisoner; "we'll go together—go together!"

Casserly, Brinsley and Delmar seemed stunned by the sudden revelation, and glared about like men dreaming.

Guy Morley set the dark lantern down and sprang upon the prisoner.

"Wretch!" he hissed; "you shall not die so easily! I'll cut your throat, you villain!"

With a strength that seemed almost superhuman, the prisoner, though his hands were bound, shoved him away and bounded toward the door through which they entered.

Guy sprang toward him and grasped him by the throat, dealing him a blow on the face with his clenched hand that caused him to stagger backward. The next moment he threw him heavily to the floor.

"You know and have an antidote for that drug!" he hissed in his ear, as he pressed the point of his knife against his throat. "Tell me where it is or you die!"

The man made no reply.

"I will count five! One—two—three—four—f—"

"Yes; I will tell!" gasped the man. "In the black bottle—under the counter!"

"Where? Up, quick, and get it, you imp of hell!" and Guy seized him by his hair and fairly pulled him to his feet. "Be quick if you would live!"

The prisoner reeled behind the little counter while Guy held the light for him.

"There it is," almost whispered the wretch.

Guy seized the bottle, held it to the light and read "Antidote" on the label.

Seizing the lantern he threw its light around the room in search of his companions.

Casserly was reeling about like a drunken man; Brinsley

was down on his hands and knees trying to get up again, and Harry Delmar was stretched out at full length on the floor like a dead man!

At that moment the prisoner sank down at his side.

Guy looked down at him a moment, and hissed:

"It's a pity you should cheat the gallows—" and then sprang forward to where Delmar was lying.

"Harry—Harry!" he called, raising his head and pressing the bottle to his lips. "Drink—drink this and live! It is not too late!"

He heard the liquid gurgling in his throat—held it to his lips a minute or two longer, and then flew to Brinsley's side.

He pressed it to his lips.

Brinsley resisted.

He forced it fiercely in his mouth, causing the blood to flow from his wounded lips.

The antidote went gurgling down his throat, and then Guy snatched the bottle away and darted over to Casserly, who was still on his feet, but almost ready to sink into utter unconsciousness.

"Drink this, Casserly!" he cried. "It will save you!"

Casserly grasped the bottle and turned it up to his lips.

"That's enough," and Guy took the bottle from him. "Lie down, now. I will save that wretch to see him hanged!"

He rushed to the little counter, seized the dark lantern and looked on the floor where the prisoner had fallen.

He started and turned pale.

The man was not there—gone—vanished!

CHAPTER XIII.

BACK FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH.

Words of tongue or pen fail in attempting to describe the conflicting emotions of Guy Morley when he discovered that the wily chief of the bold thieves had vanished.

"Of course he will reach his comrades," thought Guy, "and tell them the situation, and they will rush down upon me like so many human tigers thirsting for my blood. Why did I not slay the wretch when I had him in my power! Hark! Something or somebody is in the room now!"

He hastily drew his revolver with his right hand, while with his left he turned the dark lantern so as to throw its light around the room with a rapid sweep.

A slight noise at the door on the left caused him to turn in that direction. The light revealed the recent prisoner desperately struggling to get upon his feet so as to reach the secret spring of the hidden lock.

But the terrible drug was doing its work, and he could only get upon his knees, after crawling away from where he had fallen.

Guy recognized him at once, and with a cry of relief sprang forward, seized him by the hair and dragged him away to the middle of the room, when he released him.

"You imp of perdition!" he hissed, "I have a mind to let you die as you are! But that would be cheating justice. Here, if this antidote is any account, you may live to hang as high as Haman. If not, you can die with your victims."

Kneeling by his side he held the black bottle to his lips, and poured a quantity of its contents down his throat.

By this time he heard a groan from Casserly. Springing to his feet he hastened to his side, after turning the lantern in that direction, and found him slowly reviving.

He seemed like one just waking out of a deep sleep, rubbing his eyes and gazing around as if trying to collect his confused senses.

"You feel better now, do you?" Guy asked.

Casserly looked vacantly at him, as though but half comprehending him.

A groan from Brinsley caused Guy to turn to him, and Casserly sat there on the floor, slowly gathering his wits.

Brinsley recovered the same as did Casserly, and was as much confused in his ideas. He did not know where he was or what ailed him.

Poor Harry Delmar was the last to show returning consciousness. He had drunk freely of the drugged wine, and being less used to it, suffered most in consequence.

"Guy," Casserly called a few minutes later, as he watched his movements, "what's—the—matter—with him?"

"He's fearfully drugged," replied Guy; "as you and Brinsley were."

"Drugged?"

"Yes, that wine was heavily drugged. You have had a narrow escape."

Casserly struggled to his feet and reeled about like a drunken man.

"Drugged—drugged!" he repeated several times. "Where is that devil?"

"He is all right," said Guy. "Here, help Brinsley to recover his wits by walking him about the room, and I will attend to Harry."

The dark lantern gave but little light except where focussed, but still Casserly could see his friend as he sat on the floor, rubbing his eyes, and otherwise acting like one just waking from a deep sleep. He staggered over to his side, and attempted to pull him to his feet.

"You've been drugged almost to death, Brinsley," he said. "Get up and walk it off."

"Eh?" grunted Brinsley.

"Get up!" said Casserly, peremptorily.

"Eh?"

"Get up, I say! You've been poisoned and so have I."

Brinsley made no reply, but tried to get upon his feet; but his legs refused to sustain him, and he sank down to a sitting posture again.

Guy turned to Casserly with:

"You would have been dead had I not forced him to give me the antidote. I stuck my knife into him and tortured the secret out of him."

Casserly gazed at him with increasing astonishment, as Guy held up the black bottle in the light of the dark lantern.

"No—no," he said, "we would not have died. I understand it all now. It was not a fatal drug, but one that produces insensibility for a long time, probably, or else he would never have taken it himself. My God! Guy, he is the most daring man I ever saw or heard of. Where is he now?"

"There he lies on the floor over there," and Guy pointed to where the captive chief of the thieves lay prone on his back.

Casserly took the dark lantern and turned its powerful rays full on the unconscious man's face. Kneeling by his side he carefully examined every feature of his countenance, while Guy continued to work with Harry Delmar.

Slowly but surely he and Robert Brinsley recovered from the effects of the drug; but they all felt very sick from it.

"You were right for once in your life, Morley," said Casserly, "when you warned us against drinking that wine."

"Yes, that's so," assented Brinsley, promptly.

"I am fully persuaded that it is dangerous at all times," replied Guy. "I wish I had never touched the first glass."

"Why so?"

"Because then I could never have taken the second one."

"I don't see that you have been hurt by the second or third one," said Casserly.

"Well, I do. I have to struggle now against a thirst that seems determined to drag me to the gutter."

Sick as he was, Eugene Casserly smiled.

"You have never felt thirst, because you have always quenched it with wine. Swear off just one week and you will find out something about your will power. Hark! Listen!"

Both men assumed a listening attitude. A confused sound of voices was heard in some other room, and the sound seemed to come nearer each moment.

"They have discovered our escape from that dungeon!" ex-

claimed Guy, "and they are looking for us. Here, let the light fall on that door there, so that we can see to shoot down any man that enters!" and he instantly threw the light against the door, while Casserly and Brinsley drew their revolvers for the expected fray.

They waited several minutes, and then the voices became more plain again.

"Why, there's a way to barricade that door!" Brinsley suddenly exclaimed. "See the bar and guards!"

Quick as a flash Guy Morley sprang forward and placed a slender, flat bar of iron in the guards on either side of the door just as some one from the other side touched the secret spring with a snap.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNCONSCIOUS REVELATIONS.

Guy Morley plainly heard the snap of the spring.

"Just in time," he whispered to his comrades, as they stood silent and motionless to listen.

Snap went the spring again, and a pressure against the door was perceptible.

But the iron bar would have stood the pressure of ten thousand pounds.

Whispering voices were heard on the other side.

"There must be other secret doors," said Guy to his comrades. "Stand here till I search the walls all around the room."

Seizing the lantern he made a minute examination of the walls on all sides, but was unable to find any but the two doors already mentioned.

Both of those were secured, and then they breathed free.

By this time Harry Delmar was sufficiently recovered to thoroughly understand the situation.

He placed himself on guard with the others, and vowed dire vengeance on the captain of the thieves.

"You are right, Guy," he said. "We should not have touched wine in such a place as this."

"No, nor anywhere else," said Guy. "It is very strange that you should take to drinking—just as I swore off."

"Don't talk to me about it, Guy. I have nothing in life worth living for now, and don't care what becomes of me. You know not what I lost in that first glass of wine; this is one of the woes of wine which I shall expect to meet with often, and shall meet it with perfect indifference to consequences."

"Harry, my dear fellow," said Guy, "I don't like to hear you talk that way. You can regain all you have lost if——"

"No—no—no!" interrupted Harry, "you don't know."

"Hush!" whispered Casserly, as he heard voices and footsteps again on the other side of the door.

They listened.

"Captain!" called a voice from the outside.

Of course the captain didn't answer. He was still unconscious.

"Captain!" still louder.

"Captain Crampton!"

"Ah!" muttered Casserly; "so that's his name, eh? Well, give us some more information."

"Let's break it down," said one.

"It can't be done if the bar is up," said another.

"We can saw a hole in it, then," suggested another.

"Yes—we must do something, for they have not left the building, as every point is guarded. We must get the captain out of their clutches, and silence them forever!"

"Yes—yes—they know too much now to be allowed to get away alive."

"Do you hear that?" Morley asked. "It is to be a fight to the death."

A groan from the captain on the floor startled them.

"Ah! he is coming to. The antidote will save him, too. I think we had better bind him, as he may make a break when we least expect it, and get away from us."

Casserly at once proceeded to bind him again, leaving him free as to his feet.

But he let him lie there on the floor with the light from the dark lantern streaming full on his face.

They watched him as he came out of the stupor caused by the drug.

Several groans, accompanied by severe twitching of the muscles of the face, indicated returning consciousness.

Suddenly the captain exclaimed:

"Now you've got 'em—make short work of them! Cast 'em into the great sewer, and let the rats pick their bones!"

The four friends shuddered.

"Raise the trap-door, Naggers!" he cried again. "Down with 'em!"

He rolled over on his side and remained silent several minutes, the four friends glaring down upon him, eager to catch every word that came from his lips.

He spoke again:

"Ha—ha—ha!" came from him again. "That drugged wine came from Naggers' hands. It did the work finely. I knew it would hold them a whole day and then I would come around again. What fools men are to drink poison in every glass of wine they take! Ah! yes, I remember now. One fellow wouldn't drink any, and he seized me as I tried to get out of the room," and then, as if again struggling in Guy Morley's grasp he sprang up to a sitting posture on the floor and screamed: "Help, Naggers! Help, Brawny—oh, God! why don't some of you come? Break the door down! There is but one of them left! Help—help!"

"They are murdering the captain!" cried a voice outside the door, and the next moment a tremendous thumping on the door told of a desperate effort to break door and all down.

The iron bar was too much for them. It resisted all their united strength.

"Bring the auger and saw," cried one who appeared, from his command, to have authority among them.

A few minutes later the grinding cutting of an auger was heard by the four friends. Soon the auger came through and was withdrawn to make room for a small saw.

But ere the saw made its appearance, Casserly placed the muzzle of his pistol in the auger hole and pulled the trigger.

A yell followed the explosion, and then groans convinced our heroes that somebody had been hurt. Curses loud and deep were heard, in which Crampton, the captive chief, joined, he being now fully restored to consciousness.

"Look here!" exclaimed Harry Delmar, turning savagely upon him, "keep that tongue of yours quiet, or your remarks may prove to be your dying speech."

Crampton suggested that he go to a very warm place, and Harry slapped him on the mouth, saying:

"I'd horsewhip you for two cents!"

"You are a coward, sir, to strike an unarmed man!" retorted Crampton.

"By the holy poker!" exclaimed Harry, hastily untying the captain's hands, "I'll thrash you like a dog in a fair fight, or acknowledge myself whipped! Stand up here, and take it like a man!" and to the astonishment of Casserly, Brinsley and Morley, Harry pulled him to his feet, and then squared off for a fisticuff with him.

At first Crampton was not disposed to fight, but Harry tapped him on the nose, and exclaimed:

"First blood for me!"

This angered him to such a degree that he forced the fighting, and pushed Harry hard for a minute or two. But the pupil of Uncle Bill Tovee upheld the prowess of the old master, and floored his antagonist with a terrific blow on the jaw.

"Time!" called Casserly, after waiting a long time for the floored man to rise.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed Brinsley; "the belt is yours, Harry."

"If you don't take back that word 'coward,' you son of a thief," hissed Harry, bending over Crampton, "I'll pound you to a jelly where you lay."

"Yes—yes, I'll take it back," said Crampton.

"Tie him again, Harry;" and Delmar tied his hands and feet hard and fast.

CHAPTER XV.

IN A LIVING TOMB.

The shot Casserly had fired through the auger hole in the door had the effect to make the thieves cautious, and to keep away from that dangerous locality. They retired from hearing, and for more than an hour were not heard from.

But if they could not get the four friends to destroy them, the thieves were determined they should not get away to bring destruction upon them.

"Hark!" said Casserly, as the sound of a hammer fell upon their ears; "listen to that hammering. They are trying to get in some other way."

"Let 'em get in if they can," remarked Guy. "They'll find this the hottest room they ever entered in their lives."

"They are hammering at the door now," exclaimed Delmar.

"Be ready to receive 'em," and the light was thrown against the door.

"Why, they are driving nails," said Brinsley, after listening for a while.

"So I thought," remarked Guy. "I wonder what they're up to?"

"I say, in there!" called a voice on the outside, "we've nailed you up in there! You are in a living tomb! Ha—ha—ha!"

"But your chief is in here," answered Guy.

"Better he perish than all of us!" was the ready reply.

"Do you hear that, captain?" said Casserly. "Your pals are going back on you."

Crampton smiled grimly, and said:

"He is right. It is better that one should die than all should suffer."

"Don't you know any way of getting out of here, except by those two doors?"

"I know no other way, and no sound can go beyond these walls save on that side," nodding his head toward the door.

"I don't believe you. If you don't find some way of getting out of this place, I'll proceed to torture you in a way that would make the Spanish Inquisition pale with envy."

"What would you do?" Crampton asked, slightly paling.

"Well, I don't know exactly, but I think I would skin you by slow degrees. I think that would be a little painful to you. Take off an inch at a time, say, and cut off your fingers, a joint at a time. Perhaps I can think of something worse, as I am quite original in my ideas."

Crampton said not a word in reply, but his face assumed a death-like pallor.

"You like the prospect, I suppose?"

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I am at your mercy. There is no other way but one, and that would be courting almost instant death to attempt it."

"Ah! I thought there was some other way," chuckled Casserly. "Where is it?"

"The main sewer!" hoarsely replied Crampton.

"The main sewer! Where is that, pray?"

"Under the ground."

"So it is, but where?"

"Under us."

"Why is it so dangerous?"

"Gasses and rats."

"Gasses and rats? I can understand the gas, but rats certainly won't endanger one's life."

"I have known a lot of them to destroy a strong man in ten minutes," and Crampton's eyes seemed wild in their expression as he related his horrible story.

"Well, we'll send you down first to test both."

"No—no—no!" shrieked the man. "I won't go—I won't go!"

"We will throw you in," persisted Casserly.

"Ha—ha—ha!" cried the desperate villain; "you can't do it! You can't find the trap! Ha—ha—ha! Let's see you find it—find it!"

"Oh, well, we can skin you for an eel," quietly remarked Casserly. "You see, we don't propose to stay here and perish of starvation in order that a gang of thieves and murderers might live."

"But why torture me for——"

"Because you gave orders to have us decoyed into this den!" interrupted Casserly. "It was a put-up job, and you will get no mercy from us—understand that!"

"I can show you the trap to the sewer," faltered Crampton, his courage fast failing him.

"Very well. Where is it?"

"Crampton was assisted to his feet, and then he went to a certain part of the room, and touched a secret spring on the wall. Instantly a trap-door in a corner dropped, and a flood of almost suffocating gas poured into the room from the dark hole.

"Close it again!" said Morley, quickly. "That would destroy life in twenty minutes."

The door was closed again.

"Is it always so strong?"

Casserly asked the question, and Crampton replied:

"No; when the tide is low it is not so bad. The tide is up now, and the pressure of the water at the mouth of the sewer forces the gas up the main. A strong wind would do the same."

"Thanks for the information. Is it not strange the gas does not kill the rats?"

"That is something I never could understand," was the reply. "They live and grow there to enormous size, and are as fierce as tigers in attacking man or beast."

"How know you that? Have you ever known them to attack a beast of any kind?"

"Yes. We have thrown them dogs, cats, and even goats, and they were instantly devoured."

"My God!" cried Brinsley, "and this in the heart of New York city!"

"Hell has no fiends like these!" exclaimed Guy Morley. "They should all be eaten by the rats."

"Have you ever thrown any human beings down there?" Casserly asked.

Crampton refused to answer.

"Are you sure there is no other way we can escape?" Delmar asked, in a determined tone.

"Yes; there is no other way."

"Is there no way of cutting through that door—nothing with which we can cut through?"

Crampton shook his head.

"We can use our knives," suggested Harry.

"And get shot as the auger man did," replied Guy.

"Then for the sewer when the tide goes out," said Harry, desperately.

"Hark! Listen! What's that?" and all four turned, weapons in hands, and listened.

CHAPTER XVI.

CRAMPTON DISAPPEARS.

The noise they heard was of men engaged in violent altercation, and Captain Crampton seemed deeply interested in listening.

"God grant that it is the real police attacking the thieves!" exclaimed Morley.

"Amen!" responded Casserly, "but it is not the case; they are quarreling among themselves about what is best to be done with us."

"It seems that we are a white elephant on their hands," said Brinsley.

"Yes," added Harry, "and we'll be something worse before we get through with them; I am as hungry as a wolf."

"And I am as dry as a powder mill," remarked Brinsley; "I'd like a drink of wine, but no more of that drugged stuff for me."

"There is plenty of good wine there, sir," said Crampton.

"Excuse me, but I don't want any of it," said Brinsley, in a very emphatic tone.

"I hope you will allow me to drink a bottle of it, then," added Crampton.

Harry Delmar and Guy Morley were listening to the quarreling in another room, and in a few minutes decided that there was a serious split among the dozen or more of thieves. Some were in favor of breaking into the room and killing the four men outright, and end the trouble then and there, while others were in favor of the slow process of starvation.

"They can't get away," said one, very emphatically.

"But it would take a week or ten days to do that," said another, "and time is precious to us, you know."

"Very true; but it will be sure, and that is the main point."

"But Captain Crampton would perish in that case."

"So he would; but with your plan four or five of us would perish, or be desperately wounded, in which case the police might get a clew which would lead to something worse."

"That's true, every word of it," commented a third, and in the end it was decided to let starvation do the work, while they kept a strict watch on all the exits from the place.

"Now we can hold a council of war," said Casserly, turning to his companions. "What shall we do? The light in that little lantern will not last always. We shall soon be in impenetrable darkness, when our case would be bad, indeed."

"I am in favor of giving the captain just five hours to get us out, or kill him if he doesn't do it," said Brinsley. "He knows the building, and if he can't get us out, let him head the funeral procession."

"I second that motion," said Harry.

"It's a good idea," added Morley.

"What say you, captain?" Casserly asked of Crampton.

"Give me a glass of wine, and I will do my best," replied Crampton.

"Is there any wine here that is not drugged?"

"Yes, plenty of it."

"Where is it?"

"All those bottles with the gold seals on them are free from the drug."

"Of course you'll drink half a bottle to prove it," said Brinsley.

"Yes."

"Now, look here, fellows," said Guy Morley, "wine is the primary cause of our being in this fix. I think you should sign a pledge right now instead of touching a drop more of the stuff."

"But we must take it now," said Brinsley, "as we have nothing to eat."

"Let me die sober if I must perish," said Guy. "Now, if ever, we should have our sober judgment about us."

Casserly made no reply himself to the remarks of Guy, but very quietly went behind the bar, took up one of the bottles with the gold seal, knocked the neck off, filled a glass with the sparkling fluid, and gave it to the captain to drink.

Crampton drank it off without the least hesitation, and asked for another glass, saying:

"I am very dry."

"So am I," added Brinsley.

"We'll wait a half hour to see how it works," said Casserly, as he handed Crampton another glass.

At the end of the half hour, Crampton was all right, and Casserly and Brinsley finished the bottle without hesitation, Harry fearing to risk it.

"There will be at least two of us sober to take off the drunken ones," remarked Guy, as he saw Harry refuse to drink the wine.

"Better wait till we get drunk before indulging in such remarks," suggested Casserly, warmly.

"Wine on empty stomachs never fails to intoxicate," replied Guy.

"But we will go it mild," said Brinsley, taking the second glass.

"Oh, yes, very mild," sarcastically.

"Try some, Harry; it's good."

"I believe I will. The first glass did more mischief than all the others can. Give me a glass."

Brinsley poured out a glass full for him, and he tossed it off at a gulp.

They were standing at the counter, all leaning on it save Crampton, who stood near the end of the counter quietly looking on and listening.

Suddenly he disappeared through a trap-door in the floor, which instantly closed again with a snap.

"Good Heavens!" cried Guy Morley, who saw the whole thing. "He has got away—he is gone!"

"Who has?" cried Casserly.

"Crampton!" replied Guy. "He went down through a trap-door here!" and seizing the dark lantern he examined the floor, finding the crevices of a trap-door some two feet square near the end of the counter. "Here it is! He went through here. But for that infernal wine he would have been lying there still on his back. As we are doomed we may as well drink to utter unconsciousness and let them throw us to the sewer rats!"

The other three were astonished at the sudden escape of the master-spirit of the thieves, and glared at each other as if to read their thoughts.

Guy Morley said nothing more, but placing the light on the table, or counter, deliberately proceeded to break every bottle within his reach.

"What in blazes are you doing?" Casserly asked.

"Crusading," was the reply, as he smashed half a dozen bottles of champagne at a single blow.

In two minutes more there was not another bottle of wine, drugged or otherwise, in the room.

"If you want another drink you will have to go outside of this establishment to get it," remarked Guy Morley, as he surveyed the wreck he had made. "Maybe you will work the harder now to get out."

"Ha-ha-ha!" came a mocking laugh from somewhere in the room, "but you won't get out!"

Guy Morley snatched up the dark lantern, and flashed the light around the room in search of the owner of the voice, but only the dismal walls were revealed to his anxious gaze.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ESCAPE.

"That was Crampton's voice," said Harry Delmar, "and it was in this room. There is some secret door, or trap-door, which he cautiously opened to mock us."

"I'd give all my future expectations to get one fair shot at him," said Brinsley.

"We've got to get out of this place somehow," said Morley, desperately. "This little lantern is nearly empty of—"

"Yes, we must do something," interrupted Casserly, "or we'll soon be in the dark and at their mercy. Shall we take to the sewer?"

"No!" was the unanimous response of the other three."

"Shall we cut through that door and fight our way out?"

"Yes, if we can," said Morley.

"If we can?" said Brinsley.

"Yes, if we can," added Delmar, shaking his head.

"We must do it. Show your knives."

Each man produced his knife.

Morley alone possessed one that was not an ordinary pocket-knife.

"Ah! we can cut the door nearly through with that!" said Casserly, "and then suddenly kick it in and dash through, ready to fight it out."

Harry Delmar took the light and searched under the counter amid the debris of the wine bottles, and found there quite a lot of burglars' and carpenters' tools.

"Oh, but see here!" he exclaimed, lifting up several jimmies to full view. "We can just lift that door off its hinges with these."

"Great Hackensack!" cried Brinsley, seizing one of the instruments, "I could break out of any jail in the world with this;" and he ran to the door with it to commence operations at once.

The little iron giants were well calculated for the work, and Morley aiding him, they soon had the door loosened from its fastenings.

"Be ready now with your revolvers!" whispered Casserly.

The next moment Brinsley kicked the door down and Morley threw the light of the dark lantern across the threshold.

But not a soul was there to oppose their exit, to their utter astonishment.

"What can it mean?" they asked.

"Look out for a trap of some kind," whispered Morley. "You may depend on it they don't intend to let us get away if they can help it."

"Ha-ha-ha!" came that mocking laugh again from the room they had just vacated; "fools—fools—fools!"

"Keep ahead," said Casserly, as Morley led the way with the dark lantern, casting a light before him.

They wended their way along the narrow passage till they came to a door, which yielded to the pressure brought to bear upon it.

"Why, this is the dungeon we left to escape that gas!" exclaimed Delmar.

"So it is. Let's get out at once."

"Here's that ladder. Let's try that trap-door with the jimmies."

Brinsley seized the ladder, placed it in position and ran up till he could reach the trap-door. In a few minutes he raised it and peered around into a room, but dimly lighted from the light of day.

"Come up!" he whispered, leading the way up the ladder.

The others quickly followed and closed the trap-door after them.

"This way!" cried Casserly, bursting through another door that led into a room that looked out on the street. "We are safe now! There's the street!"

They made a dash for the windows, but found them fastened securely.

"Try the street door!"

Delmar wrenched the lock from the door and was the first to step out into the open air.

"Free!" he muttered, as he sprang to the sidewalk. "I never want such another racket as that."

"I don't see any one around here," said Casserly. "In the open air I would like to settle the difficulty with the whole band."

"Sensible! Come on," and Delmar led the way. "I can't understand why they let us get out so easily. They certainly permitted us to get away. Of that I am sure."

The truth was the thieves were ignorant of their escape until nearly an hour after they had gone.

Crampton had called them to an upper room to decide on a

plan to suffocate them with gas by means of a small rubber hose.

They agreed to the plan, and one of their number was sent out to purchase the hose. It was while he was gone that the four friends escaped.

On reaching the Bowery Guy Morley suggested that they go to a restaurant and have a square meal.

"I'm as hungry as the man who invented eating," he said, smiling at Brinsley, who snatched an apple from an Italian's fruit stand.

"So am I, and as dry," said Brinsley.

"There's a hydrant—help yourself."

"Tap it and I will," he retorted; "I am not afraid of my native drink."

"Nor imported ones either," laughed Casserly.

"Not much, unless they are drugged."

"All imported liquors are more or less drugged—made from chemicals of various kinds," said Guy.

"When did you find that out?" Casserly asked.

"I've known it a long time."

"Yet you kept on drinking all the same?"

"Yes."

"Which shows you didn't believe it, eh?"

"It shows that I didn't care or think much about it at the time. It's useless to talk about it, Casserly, for you know how near that wine came to killing all of you."

"Here's a restaurant," said Brinsley; "let's have a square meal."

They entered and ordered a dinner for four—for it was past noon—and waited patiently for its appearance.

"We'll go to police headquarters when we get through with this," remarked Delmar.

"Yes, that's the racket," added Brinsley; "we'll give them something to do that'll make 'em sick of the business."

When they were nearly through eating their dinner, they heard the fire engines passing on a full run, but paid little attention to the incident.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIRE.

Let us now return, for a few minutes, to the secret gang of thieves under the leadership of Crampton.

That daring villain had faced death a thousand times, and had a nerve of iron. He yielded only when death was the only alternative, as when Guy Morley pressed his knife against his throat, and made him give up the secret of the antidote to the powerful drug in the wine.

The drug was not fatal in effect—had it been he would not have taken the wine himself—but would produce insensibility, lasting from twenty-four to thirty-six hours. He hoped that his men would be able to overpower Morley and his party during that time, and throw them into the sewer below.

But Morley frustrated his designs, and in his desperation he resolved to cast himself through a trap-door, into the pit where their stolen goods were concealed, and work his way to his companions in crime.

"Nor I," added Brinsley.

It was a desperate resolve, for, with his hands tied he was liable to be fatally hurt; yet to remain seemed equally desperate.

He touched the spring and shot down through the trap-door like a rock cast into the water, and the door closed again with a snap. He alighted on his feet and fell backward against a pile of goods which saved him from serious injury, though the shock unsettled him for several minutes.

"Ah!" he muttered. "I am out of their clutches now, and have them in mine. I will show them the mercy shown me," and scrambling to his feet he made his way along a secret

passage to the rooms above, where he startled his companions by suddenly appearing in their midst with his hands bound behind him.

"How did you manage it, captain?" Naggers asked in astonishment.

"By way of the store room," he replied.

"Will they not go by the same route?"

"No. They'll never find that secret spring."

He was right.

"What shall we do with them?" was the next question asked him.

"Send them to the sewer rats," was the reply.

"But how?"

"I don't know yet. They are daring, desperate fellows. I only wish they belonged to our crowd. But they must die or we are lost. It is war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt with us now."

At last it was decided that with a rubber hose some fifty or sixty feet long, they could unscrew the burner from a gas fixture on the floor above, attach the hose and run it down through a hole into the room where the four friends held possession.

One of their number was sent for the hose, and during his absence Crampton related to his comrades his terrible experience with the drugged wine.

It was at this juncture that Guy Morley and his friends escaped from the building.

When the man with the rubber hose returned they proceeded at once to put into execution the fiendish plan to suffocate their supposed prisoners with ordinary coal gas. They attached it to the gas-pipe and carried the other end below to connect it with the room in which they were confined.

But when they reached the door which they had nailed up they found it open, wrenched from its hinges, and the four daring young men gone.

"Eternal perdition!" exclaimed Crampton; "we are lost if they escape. Search the building for them! Kill them at any cost!"

The men hurried through the narrow passage and discovered the ladder that enabled them to get to the rooms above and thence out to the street.

"They have escaped us!" gasped Crampton, his face as pale as death. "There is but one resource left to us. We must fire the old building and thus put it out of their power to betray us by a search of the premises. Fire it in a dozen places at once. Empty every oil can you can find on the floors and apply the match."

In less than five minutes from that time dense volumes of smoke were seen issuing from the immense pile of old frame buildings. When the engines arrived on the ground they could only prevent its spread. It burned like tinder, and the mystery of many a horrid crime went up in smoke.

When Harry Delmar and his comrades came out of the restaurant they naturally asked where the fire was.

He was told, and in surprise they hurried back in the direction whence they had come, and saw their recent prison crumbling to ashes.

"Great God!" exclaimed Casserly. "What desperate fellows they are! They fired that building to keep us from bringing the police in there. They have some other den in the city. We must look out for them. They will never forgive or forget us."

They mingled with the vast throng of people who crowded as near the burning buildings as the police would permit, and gazed at the dense volume of ascending smoke in meditative silence.

Suddenly Harry Delmar saw a man whom he recognized as one who was present in the room into which Joe Betts had introduced them just before they discovered his treachery. He closely examined him and then called Guy Morley's attention to him.

"Yes," whispered Guy, "I saw him there; I'd swear to it."

"So would I," said Harry. "Tell Casserly and Brinsley, and I'll go up and speak to him."

Harry walked up to the fellow and touched him on the shoulder. The man sprang aside as if stung, and seemed on the point of taking to his heels, when Harry said:

"You fellows are playing the very deuce. There was no need of this thing."

"I—I—don't—understand you, sir!" the fellow stammered.

"Oh, of course not, but you see I understand you. I met you last night, you know, when poor Betts got wiped out."

"I never saw you before, sir," said the fellow, gathering courage each moment.

"No—not before last night. Here are my three friends, who remember meeting you. Where is Crampton? I want to see him."

"I don't know Crampton," said the fellow, as Casserly and the other two came up.

"Oh, pshaw! What's the use of playing that game on us? You're one of the gang."

The man paled, and looked uneasily around him. He seemed to be looking for some means of escape, thinking the four were either going to arrest him, or else give him in charge of a policeman.

Suddenly he made a desperate plunge into a mass of women and children, knocking about a dozen of them right and left, and raising quite an excitement among the spectators.

Running against a rather masculine-looking Irishwoman, she caught him by the hair to prevent herself from falling to the pavement.

To her intense astonishment the whole scalp came off in her hand, and she went to the ground with it, amid a roar from the spectators.

"Seize him!" cried Casserly, darting forward in pursuit. "Stop thief—stop thief—stop thief!"

CHAPTER XIX.

GUY MORLEY'S DISCOVERY.

The cry of "stop thief" created such an excitement in the vast concourse of people that the real thief succeeded in escaping, leaving the crowd laughing at the woman who had snatched the wig from his head.

"Och!" she exclaimed, as she scrambled to her feet, clutching the wig in her right hand, "phat've I done now! Howly mither o' Moses, but its bald-headed the spalpeen'll be whin he goes home!"

"You are right, ma'am," said Brinsley. "That fellow was a bad one, but you snatched him bald-headed."

"Sure, an' wasn't he afther runnin' forninst me, a dacent woman!" she replied. "Biddy Malone is not the one as let's a mon rin into her at all—at all."

"Will you sell the hair, Mrs. Malone?" Brinsley asked.

Mrs. Malone held up the wig and looked at it, and then glanced at Brinsley.

"Sure, an' is it the hair ye want?"

"Yes. I'll give you a dollar for it."

"Whoop!" yelled Biddy, tossing the wig in Brinsley's face. "Show me another thafe. It's Biddy Malone as'll snatch 'em bald-headed for one dollar."

The crowd roared, and Brinsley paid her the dollar, taking the wig and turning away with Casserly and the others.

"What are you going to do with that thing, Brinsley?" Guy Morley asked, as they wended their way toward the Bowery.

"Wait and see," he replied. "I may want to wear it some day myself. We may hear from those fellows again."

"So I think," assented Casserly, "and I care not how soon."

"Ditto!" exclaimed Harry. "Give me plenty of elbow room, and I don't fear the whole gang."

They went direct to their hotel, and repaired to their rooms without saying anything to any one as to the cause of their

long absence. Having had no sleep for over thirty hours, they retired to bed, and slept until quite late in the evening.

But they did not meet until the next morning, when each appeared, refreshed and bright as ever.

"Shall we report to the police?" was the question under consideration as they discussed their breakfast.

"I think we had better wait till we can spot some of them," remarked Brinsley.

"Ah, that would be playing into their hands," said Morley, "for the whole gang would be spotting us all the time."

"I think they have done that already," observed Harry, "so we may shape our plans without any regard to them whatever."

"Exactly. You are right, Harry," and Casserly shook hands across the table with Delmar; and then, raising a cup of tea to his lips, added: "Here's looking at you, old fellow."

"I hope you won't look at me over a cup of tea," said Brinsley. "That's an old maid's drink. Let's have something stronger."

"Not at breakfast," protested Guy, and the matter was dropped.

After the meal they strolled out on Broadway, and walked leisurely down that fashionable thoroughfare arm in arm.

When they reached a point opposite the saloon where they had first encountered Crampton's gang, Casserly proposed that they enter and have a drink.

"No," said Guy. "We'd better keep away from there. It's a dangerous place. Who knows but what the barkeeper belongs to the gang?"

"What if he does?"

"Well, it would hardly be safe to drink any of his liquors if he does."

"That's so," said Harry. "I guess I won't drink anything fellows."

"Well, have a cigar, then," said Brinsley, and he turned and entered with them. Guy finally followed, anxious to see who he could find there belonging to Crampton's gang.

It was early in the day, and but few customers were in the place.

The barkeeper, however, instantly recognized them, and seemed greatly astonished at seeing them there.

"Give us some good wine," said Casserly, stepping up to the counter, "if you have any that has not been drugged."

"D—drugged!" exclaimed the barkeeper.

"Yes. I want none but the pure stuff," said Harry.

"Oh, yes, of course. I never keep any other kind," and the mixer of poisons placed before them a bottle of wine from which they filled small wine glasses, and drank freely. Morley took a cigar and proceeded to light it, when a man entered, who at once attracted his attention.

He wore a wig of fiery red hair, but no beard. His face was smooth shaved.

The barkeeper greeted him as he would have greeted any stranger, but Morley noticed a certain exchange of glances between them that convinced him they were by no means strangers to each other.

The newcomer's face was new to him; he had no recollection of ever having seen him before. But as the man raised his hand to place a cigar in his mouth, Guy Morley noticed a peculiar ring on his little finger, the sight of which caused him to start as if he had been stung.

From the ring he glanced up at the face. It was strange to him. He could not recognize it.

Yet the ring he would have sworn to anywhere, on account of its peculiarity and the association of his first view of it.

He looked at the man steadily in the eyes, their eyes met after a moment, and Guy Morley again started.

The man was Crampton, the leader of the thieves!

But the flowing black beard was gone, and a wig of fiery red locks adorned his head.

"How are you, captain?" Guy exclaimed, extending his hand familiarly toward him.

The man glanced quickly around at him and said:

"I don't know you, sir, and I am not a captain."

"No, I know you don't know me, but I know you," said Guy, coolly facing him. "You are Crampton, the thief!"

The man only smiled, but Casserly, Brinsley and Harry Delmar turned upon him keen, searching glances, but were not able to recognize him.

They had never noticed the ring on his little finger.

"Do you wish to insult me, sir?" Crampton asked, drawing himself up like an insulted clergyman.

"Yes," replied Guy, "if it is possible to insult a thief."

"See here, Guy," said Casserly, after gazing into Crampton's face for a minute or so, "you are wrong."

"Wrong the devil!" exclaimed Guy, knocking Crampton's hat from his head and sending the wig of red hair with it. "I'd know the scoundrel in Hades!"

The now revealed man made a plunge forward and knocked Morley down by a well directed blow between the eyes, and then dashed out of the room ere the astonished friends of Guy could interfere.

"Stop him—it's Crampton!" cried Guy, scrambling to his feet.

But he was gone, and the four friends were left there to gaze into each other's faces as if wondering what next would happen.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MEETING OF THE LOVERS.

To say that Guy Morley was mad, after having been knocked down by Crampton, would be but mildly describing his real feeling.

"I say, fellows!" he blurted out, after gazing at his three friends for nearly a minute, "if you see the Fool-killer coming hide quicker'n lightning."

"What for?" Brinsley asked.

"Poor fellow!" sarcastically replied Guy, "you can't even comprehend your danger!"

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Casserly, making a convulsive effort to suppress the roar that wanted to come out at Brinsley's expense; "that's cruel, Guy!"

"Yes—cruelty to idiots!" retorted Guy. "How Columbia College could turn out three such hollow-headed figures passes my comprehension. You let Crampton walk out before your very eyes without so much as asking him to stop."

"I am not sure it was Crampton," said Brinsley, flushed with anger at the severe language of Guy.

"Oh, no, of course not. You are incapable of——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Brinsley, hotly, "or you'll get floored again. How the devil do you know it was Crampton?"

"I recognized and unmasked him before your eyes, but your intellect was not equal to the occasion. I should have introduced him to you and vouched for his identity. I recognized the ring on his finger when he put the cigar in his mouth, and then his eyes and nose confirmed my suspicions."

"Hang me if I would ever have suspected him," said Casserly. "I thought you had made a mistake, and accused the wrong man. We'll get him next time."

"No, we won't," returned Guy. "The barkeeper here will post him about the ring, and he'll see to that hereafter."

"I don't know the man, sir," said the barkeeper.

"Don't abuse your conscience, my dear sir," spoke up Morley, quickly. "I saw a glance of recognition pass between you and him. I guess you belong to the gang yourself."

"What gang?"

"The Crampton gang."

"I do not."

"Don't believe you," said Guy.

"Don't care whether you do or not," retorted the barkeeper.

"but if you repeat the charge I'll punch your head!" and he came around from behind the bar and confronted Morley.

"I do repeat it," returned Guy, and the next moment he measured his full length on the floor, the burly barkeeper having knocked him down before he could defend himself.

The blow was a hard one, and Guy was stunned by it. Harry Delmar picked him up, while Casserly, who always prided himself on his pugilistic prowess, remarked to the barkeeper:

"Maybe you think you can serve me that way?"

"Guess I can," replied the mixer of poisons, squaring off and aiming a terrific blow at Casserly.

Casserly skilfully parried the blow and sent another in return which the barkeeper parried successfully.

"Hold on!" cried Morley, springing forward and pushing Casserly aside; "this is my fight. You can't cheat me out of it," and while the barkeeper was uncertain as to who he was to fight, Guy Morley gave him a beautiful pair of black eyes.

"Hold up, Guy!" exclaimed Brinsley, in a half whisper. "The police are at the door, and it would look bad four against one."

Guy and Casserly turned away and the four friends marched out of the saloon together, as though nothing beyond a drink had been the matter.

Out on the street Harry looked up at Guy with:

"You'll have a beautiful pair of black eyes, Guy. You'd better go to the hotel at once."

"Yes—I'll go with you," said Brinsley, and the two walked off together, leaving Casserly and Harry to continue their walk down town.

"I am sorry Guy got that black eye," remarked Harry, as he and Eugene walked along arm-in-arm.

"Yes—so am I. But who'd have thought of finding Crampton under that red wig!"

"Guy is unusually sharp in some things. I think he would make a good detective. That fellow, Crampton, is a dangerous man to deal with."

"His whole gang are on the lookout for us, no doubt. We must be on our guard or we'll get trapped again."

"By George!" gasped Harry, clutching Casserly's arm convulsively, as two ladies approached. "Madge Ellington and her mother!"

Just as Casserly looked toward the ladies they were opposite them.

Mrs. Ellington made a very stiff, formal bow in recognition of their presence; but Madge turned deathly pale and looked away in another direction.

When Casserly turned to look at Harry Delmar, he found his face as pallid as that of a dead person's.

"Why, what's the matter, Harry?" he asked, "you look ill."

"Let's go and get a drink somewhere," said Harry, in a husky tone of voice. "I don't feel very well."

"I know you don't, old fellow. Never knew you to look so pale before."

They entered a saloon together, and Harry called for brandy.

"Brandy. You want some kind of light wine, old fellow," suggested Casserly.

"Give me brandy—brandy, quick!" said Harry, and when the glass and decanter were set before him, he poured out a full glass of the fiery fluid and swallowed it at a single gulp, to the surprise of Casserly, who knew not what to think of his sudden precipitation.

With a long-drawn sigh Harry leaned against the bar and looked vacantly at his companion.

Casserly raised his glass of wine, and said:

"Here's looking at you, old fellow, and hoping you feel better."

"Give me another drink," said Harry, desperately, seizing the decanter, and almost filling his glass with the stuff.

Then raising the glass, he said to Casserly:

"I'll soon feel better or worse," and drank it down.

"Another such drink as that and you'll feel a deuced sight worse," remarked Casserly.

"Oh, no! I feel much better now," was the reply, as the strong stimulant began to send the red current to his face again.

"You'll be drunk if you take any more."

"Oh, I guess not. I can carry as much as you can," and Harry laughed a reckless, unmeaning laugh, dropping into a chair by the table.

"Oh, you mustn't sit down with all that brandy in you!" said Casserly. "Come, let's walk about so as to keep our heads clear," and taking Harry by the arm he led him out of the saloon, and walked him down Broadway.

CHAPTER XXI.

ARRESTED.

Eugene Casserly never dreamed that the meeting of Madge Ellington and her mother on Broadway was the cause of the sudden change in Harry Delmar.

Up to that moment Harry had indulged the hope that he would some day retrieve himself in Madge Ellington's eyes.

But her conduct crushed that hope, and a feeling of utter recklessness and desperation took possession of him.

His only desire now was to drown his misery in the wine cup. He cared no longer for the voice of ambition. The allurements of fame to be gained in the professional career which he and his friends had chosen, had lost their charm. He had no longer anything to live for; yet he felt that he could not commit suicide.

In this frame of mind he drank deeply and recklessly, as we have seen, and Eugene Casserly, who had been instrumental in persuading him to drink his first glass, now regretted that fatal step.

"I say, old fellow," he said to Harry, as the latter began to reel and stagger along Broadway, "hold up and walk straight, or people will say you are drunk?"

"Let (hic) 'em say so," said Harry. "Who cares (hic) for people'sh—whoop!"

"Great Jehoshaphat!" gasped Casserly, as hundreds of people turned and stared at them. "This will never do. We shall be ruined."

"Let her—his—ruin—whoop!"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Casserly, as people began to gather about them and smile at his very evident embarrassment. "I say, Harry, let's take a carriage and have a ride."

"All right. Bring on—hic—'er carrish—whoop! Trot out—hic—yer bays!"

"Here, young man," said a stalwart policeman, laying a heavy hand on Harry's shoulder. "I guess you'd better come along with me."

"You had better let me take him home in a carriage," said Casserly; "I can take care of him."

"But you have taken very poor care of him so far. He is blind drunk now, you see."

"That's 'er—hic—lie," said Harry, "I'm sober'n a—hic—goat. Never—hic—drunk in 'er—hic—life."

"Come along, sir," said the officer, pulling him roughly away from Casserly.

"Let me take him home," pleaded Casserly, again, anxious to save Harry the disgrace of an arrest on Broadway, and in his eagerness planted himself in the officer's way.

"I'll take him home, and you, too!" replied the officer, seizing Casserly by the collar and shaking him roughly. "Come along, both of you."

"Shame—shame!" cried several men in the crowd which had quickly gathered around them.

"Release me, sir!" cried Casserly, angrily. "I've done nothing to be arrested for!"

"Come along!" and the officer shook him roughly again and pushed him along in such an insulting manner that Casserly

struck him a terrific blow on the ear, causing him to reel and stagger like a drunken man.

"Whoop!" yelled Harry, "hit 'im (hic) again. G'win, ole (hic) boy!"

The officer drew his club and aimed a blow at Casserly's head.

Casserly sprang out of the way.

"If you strike at me again I'll put a bullet through your cowardly heart!" he hissed. "I know my rights as well as you do and will maintain them. Touch me now if you dare!"

"That's right, young man," exclaimed a venerable-looking old man in the growing crowd. "Stand your ground. He has no right to arrest you."

"I will go with you to the station house to look after my friend," said Casserly, "and you can prefer charges against me if you wish, but you shall not arrest me."

The officer rapped for assistance and two more came in response to his call.

"Arrest that man," said officer No. 1, pointing toward Harry's companion.

"At your peril, sir," said Eugene. "I will go with you to the station, but not under arrest."

"Will you resist, sir?"

"To the death!" replied Casserly. "I've done nothing except to ask to be allowed to carry my friend home in a carriage to save him from the disgrace of an arrest. For that he tried to arrest me. You can do it at your peril."

The two officers were not to be defied that way; they threw themselves on him, clubbed him severely and marched them both off to the station house, where they were locked up in separate cells.

Being himself unhurt, Harry Delmar went off into a drunken slumber and did not wake up until long after midnight.

On the next morning they were arraigned before a police court and fined.

They promptly paid the fine and departed, Harry to get another drink, and Eugene Casserly to employ an able lawyer to sue the officers for false imprisonment and assault and battery.

In less than two hours he had the three officers arrested and seeking bail.

But when he found Harry Delmar again he found him as drunk as a lord.

"Hello, Harry!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "You are going it strong. You'd better hold up awhile."

"Let her rip," said Harry. "Who care'sh for—hic—'spense? I don't. Whoop!"

"By the gods!" cried Casserly, in no little alarm, "you'll get us both locked up again if you don't keep quiet."

"Can't lock'er me up."

"Yes, they can."

"Whoop! Show—hic—me 'er cop!"

"Here's one," replied a policeman, just turning the corner. "What can I do for you, eh?"

"He's got a little too much, sir," said Casserly.

"I should say so. Wasn't he fined this morning for being drunk and disorderly?"

"Yes."

"Come along, sir," said the policeman, taking hold of him; "perhaps a month on the island will do him good," and he marched him off, Harry making no resistance, leaving Eugene Casserly gazing after them, pale and excited.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOWN THE HILL.

His own experience of the day before deterred him from making any effort to save Harry from being locked up again.

"Poor Harry," he muttered, as he turned away. "You'll have a hard time of it, I fear. I blame myself for your fall. I never dreamed you would go so far. Those temperance peo-

ple are not far from right. I wish I had never tasted a glass of wine in my life. I must see Brinsley, and see if we can't do something for Harry, or he may be sent to the island to-morrow, which would ruin him forever."

He lost no time in returning to the hotel.

The first man he met was Robert Brinsley.

"Hello, Casserly!" exclaimed Robert. "Where have you been all this time? I was afraid Crampton had gobbled you and Harry up."

Casserly motioned him to follow him upstairs, and led the way to his room.

"Where's Harry?" Brinsley asked, the moment they entered the room.

"In the station house."

"Good Lord!" gasped Brinsley. "Did they arrest him?"

"Yes, they arrested both of us yesterday," replied Casserly.

"What for?"

Harry got blind drunk on the street and whooped like an Indian. I tried to get him home, but the police took us both in and this morning we were fined and discharged. I went direct to a lawyer to commence suit for illegal arrest, and Harry went off and got blind drunk again. The result is a second arrest."

"Too bad—too bad!" said Brinsley. "What's the matter with him, anyhow?"

"Don't know. He seems determined to keep drunk in spite of all I can do."

"Pity he ever touched wine."

"Yes—he's going down hill as fast as he can go. Where's Guy?"

"In his room, with a pair of black eyes. He swears he won't go out till he gets rid of them."

"I must see him," and the two friends repaired to Guy Morley's room.

On entering Morley's room, Casserly was astonished at the dark spots under his eyes.

"He hit hard," Guy said, "but I'll pay him in kind yet."

"I say, Guy," said Brinsley, "Harry is in the lockup. The police have taken him in."

The shock was great. Guy Morley had a conscience. It troubled him frequently of late. He remembered the time when Harry Delmar was proud of the boast that he had never tasted wine or liquor in his life.

"Is there no chance to get him out and keep it quiet?" he asked.

"No. His name and mine will be in all the papers to-morrow," said Casserly, with a semblance of bitterness in his tones, and in a few words he related to Morley the incidents of the day before and the occurrence that morning.

"What has come over Harry, anyhow?" Guy asked.

"I don't know," said Casserly. "We were walking down Broadway when we met Mrs. Ellington and Madge. Mrs. Ellington bowed, but Madge gave us the cut direct. Harry started as if stung and said:

"Let's go and have something. I went with him. He took brandy straight and in large doses, looking very pale all the time. Do you know if there was ever an engagement existing between him and Madge?"

Guy Morley made no reply.

His face was ghastly in its whiteness.

But the room was quite dark owing to the curtains being down, hence Casserly and Brinsley did not remark it.

Conscience had given him a stab.

Yet he said nothing.

He was thinking.

And suffering.

He, too, had been a party to the crime of persuading Harry Delmar to drink his first glass of wine.

"We must do something to get Harry out of the station house," said Brinsley, after a pause of several minutes.

"Yes," assented Guy Morley, "but what can we do? If my

face was not so discolored I would go to a certain man whose influence could save him."

"Who is he? Perhaps, if I were to carry a note from you to him it would do as well."

"He is Madge Ellington's father."

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed Casserly.

"That would never do," said Brinsley.

"Harry would never forgive us," added Casserly.

"Then I know no other who can help him," added Morley, with a sigh.

"I will see my lawyer," and Casserly left the room immediately to go in quest of the lawyer he himself had employed that very morning.

The lawyer succeeded in getting Harry off on the payment of a fine, and he joined his companions at the hotel a sadder and wiser man than ever.

They congratulated him.

"Give us a bottle of wine," he ordered of the waiter, who came in response to his call.

"You had better go slow, Harry," said Casserly.

"Go slow, the devil!" growled Harry. "I can't do it. It's down hill, and the brakes are gone. The first glass disarranged things. A short life and a merry one. Here's the wine. Help yourselves, fellows."

"Harry," said Guy Morley, "I once laughed at your total abstinence principles. I soon saw that you were right, but not until I had helped to persuade you to drink your first glass. I have vowed never to drink another drop. Why not do the same yourself and stand with me as in the past?"

"Too late, Guy. There is nothing for me in life worth living for," replied Harry. "I have no aim or ambition except to drown my very thoughts in the wine cup," and as he ended speaking, Harry emptied a glass full of the sparkling wine.

Casserly and Brinsley drank their wine in silence.

They began to think they had committed a crime against Harry Delmar instead of playing a joke on him.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Harry," said Casserly, as he set his glass down. "I have never been a temperance man in my life, but if I could not drink without getting drunk, and fetching up in the station house, I would swear off and never touch a drop of it as long as I lived."

Harry's only reply was to fill his glass the second time and toss it off, smacking his lips with an air of satisfaction.

"Ah!" he said, "that's good wine. Have some more."

Casserly and Brinsley laughed and filled their glasses again.

"Preaching is played," remarked Harry, at which they all laughed again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WOES OF WINE.

The three friends now worked as diligently to save Harry Delmar from drinking wine as they had formerly schemed to persuade him to drink it.

Still their efforts were fruitless.

He drank deeper and deeper, sometimes lying drunk for days in his room.

Guy Morley recovered from the black eyes which the burly barkeeper had given him and paid a visit to Madge Ellington in her elegant house.

She received him cordially and he felt sure of the prize he had been secretly plotting to win.

"Poor Harry," she said, after he had been some time seated by her side. "My heart bleeds for him."

"Why, what's the matter with Harry?" he asked in some surprise, for he had not mentioned Harry's name.

"Oh, he is killing himself!" she cried, bursting into tears, to Guy's utter amazement. "And such a bright, brilliant young man he is, too! Oh, Mr. Morley, the one who induced him to drink his first glass, knew not what he did. Heaven forgive him, whoever it was, but I can't!" and her tears burst forth afresh.

Guy Morley turned deathly pale at this burst of grief and interest on her part.

Had she been encouraging and smiling upon him solely because he was the friend and companion of Harry Delmar?

The bare suspicion that such was the fact almost made him sick; his heart sank like lead in his bosom.

He intended to propose to her on that very evening, so confident had he been that she loved him.

With a pallid face he turned to her and asked, huskily:

"What does this mean, Miss Ellington? What is Harry Delmar to you?"

She seemed surprised and gazed at him through her tears.

"Oh, I forgot," she said, "that you did not know what great friends Harry and I were. I tried to forget even his name when he fell, but could not. The thought that he was more

sinned against than sinning caused me to cry every time I thought of him. I fear that my own conduct toward him may have had something to do with his drinking. Oh, how miserable I am!" and the tears came afresh as she buried her face in her hands.

"Miss Ellington," said Guy, rising abruptly to his feet, his face as white as a sheet, "you love Harry Delmar. At the same time you have encouraged me until I learned to love you—to indulge the blessed hope that I might some day call you mine. If those who made him drink wine deserve punishment, what do you not deserve for holding this bitter cup to my lips? Though not a drop of wine may never pass my lips, still is my life wrecked, my hopes blasted, and——"

"Guy Morley," she hissed through her pearly teeth, "Harry Delmar drank his first glass unwittingly. You were a witness of his fall. You knew what he was drinking, he did not; yet you did not warn him, though you pretended friendship for him. You hoped to profit by his fall. You came to woo her who had pledged her love to him. You were a traitor to him—your friend—and now you are punished!"

Guy Morley groaned and hid his ashen-hued face in his hands.

"It is one of the woes of wine. What he suffers you now endure. May it make you more charitable to——"

"May heaven forgive you, Madge Ellington!" groaned Guy Morley, interrupting her. "I was a man; you have made me a fiend. I will yet wring cries for mercy from you!" and without another word he turned and fled from the house.

"Gone!" muttered Madge Ellington, sinking into a seat, "and may I never look upon his face again. He knows now what he made me suffer in the fall of Harry Delmar."

Guy Morley reeled and staggered away from the Ellington mansion, looking more like a ghost than a man of flesh and blood. His eyes glittered fiercely and his lips were compressed as with a desperate resolve. He had loved and lost—played high and now groped in despair.

"Curses on him!" he hissed through his white lips. "But for him she would now be mine. Harry Delmar, we are no longer real friends. But what am I thinking about? She has found out how we tempted him to his first glass. She would never listen to me again after what has happened. She is lost to me now—lost forever. I will live for revenge—will wreck her happiness as she has wrecked mine."

Guy Morley was a desperate man. Principle was simply a cloak with him. Selfishness predominated in his nature. The motive to figure in the temperance role was now gone. The price of such performance had slipped from him. He rushed into the nearest saloon and drank two glasses of wine in quick succession.

"This is the beginning of the end," he muttered, passing out of the saloon. "But where will the end be? I will be the wildest of the wild. Ha-ha-ha! Madge Ellington, vengeance does not belong to you alone!"

On reaching the hotel, Guy Morley had regained his color, but the quick-eyed Brinsley saw that he had been drinking.

"Hello, Guy!" he exclaimed. "At it again, eh? Come, have a glass with me?"

"Yes, a dozen, if you like," responded Guy, going with him into the bar-room of the hotel, where they met Casserly and Harry.

He drank a brimming glass of wine.

"How about (hic) temperance now, eh, old fellow?" asked Harry, laying a hand familiarly on his shoulder.

"Go to the devil with your temperance!" growled Guy, shaking him off rudely.

"Whew!" exclaimed Casserly, "he's got it bad. Delirium tremens on the first relapse!"

Harry Delmar, drunk as he was, half suspected the real cause of his conduct; he had been suspicious some time.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he chuckled, softly. "Nothing like forgetfulness in the wine cup, Guy. I've been there. Fill up the flowing bowl, and let care go to the winds. Bacchus is more kind than Venus, and——"

"Curses on your endless prattle!" cried Guy, suddenly wheeling around and dealing Harry a blow between the eyes; "take that, and leave me alone!"

Harry staggered back several paces, and fell in a heap on the floor, stunned by the blow, while Guy rushed out of the room like a madman.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIGHT.

The astonishment of Brinsley, Casserly, and, in fact, everyone in the bar-room, was unbounded.

"He must be out of his head," said Casserly, picking Harry up.

"Off his nut," remarked the barkeeper, sententiously.

"Got 'em bad," said another, in equally emphatic tones.

"I'll see what's the matter with him!" exclaimed Robert Brinsley, following him out of the bar-room.

Harry was only stunned.

He came to in a few minutes, completely sobered by the shock.

"Where is he?" he exclaimed. "I'll give him a chance to do that again, the coward!"

"Be quiet, Harry," said Casserly, soothingly. "Guy was drunk, you know."

"He was not as drunk as I was," and breaking away from those who had gathered about him, he rushed out into the rotunda of the hotel, where he found Guy and Brinsley together.

"Defend yourself, Guy Morley!" and the next moment they were engaged in regular prize-ring fashion, in a savage fight.

Of the two Harry was now the soberest, and in less than ten seconds he had planted stunning blows on Guy's mouth, nose and eyes, from all of which the blood was flowing freely.

"Hold Harry, Brinsley!" cried Casserly, seizing Guy around the waist and holding him away from Harry, while Harry felt himself seized from behind.

"I will kill him for this!" hissed Guy, as Casserly led him up-stairs to his room.

"No, you won't, Guy," said Casserly. "You struck the first blow, and without provocation."

"Yes, I will," repeated Guy, savagely.

"Well, if you do I will kill you!" returned Casserly, firmly.

"Harry is my friend as well as you. You will think better of this when you are sober."

He put him to bed and remained by his side until he was in a deep sleep, when he went down-stairs in search of Harry.

He found him in the bar-room still drinking, swearing like a trooper that he would give Guy another drubbing the next time he met him.

"You have punished him enough, Harry," said Casserly. "You must not drink any more now. I've got some important news for you as soon as you get sober enough to listen to it."

"What is it? Tell (hic) me now."

"Not a word until you stop drinking," was the firm reply.

Brinsley quietly cautioned the barkeeper not to let him have any more wine, and soon after they persuaded him to go up to his room.

By careful and constant watching they managed to keep both from liquor until they were perfectly sober.

Harry talked rationally, but Guy was reticent, though it was plain he bore ill will to Harry. Neither would speak to the other, and thus they drifted apart.

Fearing a renewal of the attack, Harry armed himself, and Guy did the same thing.

But they were kept apart.

Harry more than ever suspected the real cause of Guy's conduct, and felt elated thereat.

"If she rejected him, it argues that she has not yet given me up," was the thought that constantly crept into his mind. Yet under the circumstances he dared not visit her and learn his fate at her hands.

One day Eugene Casserly and Robert Brinsley came to him, and said:

"Harry, Guy has been missing these two days. He would go off alone, and we fear that the Crampton gang have got him in their clutches."

"We are no longer friends," answered Harry, "still I would not wish him any harm. I hope your fears are groundless."

"So do we, but everything in his room indicates that he intended to return in an hour or two when he went away. As we don't know any other location of the thieves than the one which has been destroyed by fire, we had better all go to the chief of police and tell him our experience with the gang."

"I am willing," replied Harry, and the three friends proceeded to report at the headquarters of the police department, where they related their adventure with Crampton and his men.

The chief of police was not in the least surprised at their story.

"They are the best organized and the most dangerous gang ever known in this city," he said. "They have friends in many departments of the city government, so they get information of every consultation in this office. You had better go well armed and keep together after leaving this office. Here, I will give you permits to carry pistols. If any one should seek to make your acquaintance after leaving here, spot him, and place my detectives on his or their tracks. It may be the means of breaking up the gang."

The three friends left headquarters and went toward Broadway, where they strolled up the street toward a well-known hotel.

In the hotel they went into the large billiard room. There were fully half a hundred men there, mostly spectators.

"Would you like to have a game, sir?" a stately, dignified-looking man asked of Eugene Casserly.

"Well, I wouldn't object to a game," was the reply, and as he arose he whispered to Brinsley:

"Watch him; he may be one of the gang."

Brinsley whispered the warning to Harry, and together they watched them play for nearly two hours. At the end of each game they went up to the bar and drank wine.

The stranger gave his name as Mr. James Burling, and introduced Casserly to two others, Duman and Higgins, as friends who had just dropped in.

Duman and Higgins were very cordial in their greeting, and each proposed to treat.

Casserly noticed peculiar glances passing between them, but he pretended to be as guileless as a dove. In the meantime Brinsley sent for a detective, and Harry went over to the bar for drinks. The detective came and spotted the three men, instructed Casserly to consent to anything they proposed, and then sent for assistance.

Soon after the last game Burling proposed to Casserly that they go to a certain place where a private game of faro was conducted, and amuse themselves. He consented, and the two left together, followed by Brinsley and the detectives.

CHAPTER XXV.

DECOYING THE VICTIM.

Out on the street they strolled down toward Union Square, Casserly apparently indifferent to the destination of the party.

Duman proposed that they attend some theater first, and then look for the elephant afterward.

"My sentiments exactly," said Casserly. "I am feeling languid to-night."

"A glass of champagne will take all the languor out of you," suggested Brinsley.

"Yes, that's the thing you want," added Harry Delmar; "and a glass would do me good, too, I'm thinking."

"Then let's have it," said Duman. "We can get some good wine in here;" and leading the way, he entered a well-known saloon, and called for a bottle of champagne, which they soon demolished.

Then they went to the theater, taking a private box where they could see everything on the stage and the greater part of the audience.

Duman proved particularly agreeable, and seemed to have many acquaintances in the audience, as Casserly, who watched his every movement, saw him bow to several. He took out an opera-glass, and carefully scrutinized the faces of each one of those acquaintances at the imminent risk of seeming rude.

A few were ladies—or females.

There was something in the face of one of them that aroused his suspicions, as she seemed deeply interested in the party in the private box.

She was what most people would call a handsome woman. But Casserly thought he had seen that face before, and that a lurking devil dwelt within that fair form.

From her he turned his glass on two well-dressed men, who had returned Duman's bow with friendly smiles.

One of them was a new face altogether. He could not remember having seen it before.

The other one had a beard and mustache—heavy and black—but that nose, and keen black eyes, were strangely familiar.

Who was it? He was of an investigative turn of mind, and resolved to fathom the mystery of that face.

When the curtain fell on the first act, quite a number arose in the audience and went out "to see a man." That man was found behind the bar next door to the theater.

The party in the private box went out on the same errand. The two men whom Casserly had inspected through his opera-glass did likewise.

They met in the bar-room.

The heavy beard and mustache were introduced to our heroes, and after drinking three or four times together, they all repaired again to the private box, just before the curtain arose on the second act.

The play was one that deeply interested Casserly and his two friends.

"How do you like the play?" the stranger asked.

"I am interested in it," replied Casserly. "I have been, and as for that matter, am yet in the same dilemma as the hero of this piece is."

"Indeed! Then it must indeed be interesting to you," said Erlon, the new-comer.

"Yes. I am curious to see how he will come out of his difficulties."

"How did you get out?" Erlon asked.

"By showing a game front," was the reply, "and a liberal use of the revolver."

"Indeed! Did you kill any one?"

"Not that I am aware of. One of my assailants was killed by one of his own side."

"You are clear of the trouble now, I hope?"

"Well, I don't know about that. At any rate I am ready for a renewal of it whenever the villains want it."

Erlon and his confederate exchanged quick glances, which Harry Delmar saw and noticed.

They changed the conversation to another less interesting topic, and then closely watched the progress of the play, which held on till eleven o'clock.

At last, however, it ended, and the throng surged out upon the street.

"Now let's go and see how the tiger is behaving himself to-night," said the new acquaintance.

"Well, where shall we go?" Casserly asked.

"Let's go and have another drink," suggested Delmar, who had already taken too much for upright navigation.

"Certainly—certainly," added Erlon. "I know where we can enjoy a quiet game with wine and woman's smiles thrown in liberally."

"That's a lark—come on, show us the way," said Brinsley. "I don't mind having a racket to-night."

"Come this way, then. It's on a cross street—up Houston street a little ways," and Erlon led the way, followed by the others.

On the way Casserly signaled to his detectives to follow and watch, and then went boldly with the conspirators.

Turning into Houston street they wended their way toward the Bowery. But they did not reach the Bowery. They entered a building and went up a flight of stairs. Then along a hall they were led till they reached the foot of another flight of stairs.

"Up this way," said Erlon, leading the way up. "The next floor."

Up on the next floor they entered a splendidly furnished room, in which were a dozen men and several women, seated at tables and playing cards.

Bottles of wine were on every table, and many were drinking copiously of a generous-looking wine that sparkled and glowed in the fine cut glasses.

Casserly glanced around the room and saw half a dozen faces, three of which he had seen at the theater that evening. At one of the tables he saw the woman who had attracted his attention, and their eyes met. He returned her gaze unflinchingly. She turned her head away as if a guilty conscious moved her.

"Here's an unengaged table," said Erlon, pointing to one in a corner of the room. "Let's take possession of it," and he pushed forward for the table.

"Drink nothing in this place," whispered Casserly to Brinsley, and he whispered the warning to Delmar.

"The devil!" ejaculated Harry. "That's too bad!"

He wanted greatly to quench his thirst in some of that rich red wine the others were drinking.

"Now what shall we have to drink, gentlemen?" Erlon asked, as they seated themselves at the table.

"Nothing, if you please," replied Casserly; "I never drink and play cards at the same time."

Erlon was astonished.

"What! Not drink any wine! And they have such splendid wine here, too! Why, they won't let us occupy this table, if we don't order at least one bottle to every game."

"Then we won't play," said Casserly, firmly. "I am not in the habit of visiting places where such unsportsmanlike rules hold," and with that he rose as if to leave the room.

"Hold on," said Erlon, rising also, and laying a hand on his arm. "That rule pertains only to this room. We can take a private room and do as we please there."

"I don't care to take a private room in a place like this. We will leave, if you please."

Erlon gave a signal, and the next instant a dozen men surrounded him and his two friends.

Erlon drew a revolver, and pointing it at Casserly's head, hissed:

"Move at your peril!"

"Ha-ha-ha, Champton!" laughed Casserly. "I knew you even in the theater. You haven't deceived me at all!"

"Maybe I have not," said Erlon, or Crampton, as we will now call him; "but I have you in my power, and you shall not escape me again so easily."

"Why, my dear sir, you are in my power," said Casserly. "Open that door there and you will find a whole platoon of police!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST TRAP—DEATH OF CRAMPTON.

Crampton involuntarily turned to the door, his face a shade whiter as he suspected the truth of the statement.

As he turned Casserly blew a shrill note, and the door flew open, revealing a dozen black-muzzled revolvers with a stalwart policeman at the back of each one.

The dumfounded villains recoiled with horror, and the officers poured into the room.

"Surrender!" cried the sergeant in command.

"Never!" hissed Crampton, firing point blank at the sergeant.

The ball grazed the sergeant's ear, and the officer in turn sent one through the villain's body, dropping him on the floor.

The others were too demoralized to resist, and surrendered through fear of a speedy death then and there.

The women screamed at the top of their voices, until the sergeant had to order them to hush, in his sternest tones.

Casserly went up to the woman he had noticed in the theatre and said:

"You are Crampton's friend, I know that well. He is dying and cannot live through the night. If you would escape the full penalty of the law you must give everything away. The gang is broken up for good now, and——"

"Can you save me?" she asked, eagerly interrupting him.

"Yes—and that is the only way you can get entirely clear."

"Squeal?"

"Yes; everyone for himself now. Your friend is gone forever. What interest more have you in the others?"

She agreed to do so and he turned to Crampton, who was lying on the floor with a coat under his head, which had been placed there by a policeman.

"So you are going, are you, Crampton?" he asked.

"Yes," said he, feebly. "I am done for—you have triumphed, curse you."

"Whose fault is it?"

"Yours."

"Of course. You think I ought to have allowed you and your gang to wipe me out. But we could never agree on that one point. Suppose now you tell the whole story of your life and——"

"No; I never squeal!" said the dying man.

"Remove that beard and mustache, sergeant," said Casserly, "and see if any of your men can recognize that face."

The sergeant removed the false beard and mustache, and the sinister face of Crampton appeared.

Each policeman gazed at that face. They could not recognize it as that of any known criminal.

"We cannot recognize it," they said, shaking their heads.

"No," said the dying man, "I have never been arrested before. I have never been even suspected by the authorities."

"Have you no confession or statement to make?" the sergeant asked.

"No."

"Do you want a doctor?"

"No, I am done for now."

"Do you want a minister?"

"No—no! I am not afraid to die."

The sergeant saw that he was going fast, and concluded to wait with his prisoners until all was over.

Suddenly the dying man called:

"Marguerite—Marguerite!"

"Here I am, Horace——"

"No—no—not that name now, Marguerite!" he interrupted quickly, as the woman with whom Casserly had talked came forward and knelt by his side.

"Marguerite," he said, taking her hand in his, "I am going away now never to return. I have loved you, and you have pretended to love me, though I knew you did not all the time. I said nothing to you about it because I had been as bad, and because I did not wish to break with you. I could not give you up. But I am going now. They will try to induce you above all others to turn state's evidence in order to condemn the others. If you say aught against a member of the band, I shall come back to you and curse you. You will never know sleep again if you squeal."

"I'll never squeal," sobbed the woman, "not if they hang me!"

"The man or woman that squeals shall be followed by me till death claims him or her—remember there is but little evidence outside against you."

Not a word was uttered by the prisoners, but every eye was turned on the dying man. He breathed heavily, clutched his breast, as if to tear away something that pained him, gave a gasp, stretched himself out at full length, shuddered and died.

"That ends it," said the sergeant. "Bring the prisoners along."

Every prisoner, male and female, was handcuffed, and marched along the street to the nearest station house, where they were locked up to await the pleasure of the authorities the next day.

"By George, but that was well played, boys!" said Brinsley, as they turned to go back to their hotel.

"Yes, well played, indeed," said Casserly, "but if we had taken a single glass of wine in that place it would have been all over with us."

"How do you know that?" Delmar asked.

"Something told me that that was the game to be played, and I could read it in Crampton's eyes."

"By George, it's the confounded wine that has done the mischief all along!" burst out Harry again. "I'm almost tempted to swear off and never touch it again."

"It wouldn't hurt you to do it," remarked Casserly, "for you go in pretty deep sometimes."

"So I do and sometimes I feel as though I wouldn't care ever to draw a sober breath again. I haven't anything to live for, and why not go in for a good time?"

"But getting blind drunk isn't having a good time," put in Brinsley. "I've been there and ought to know."

"But you had a good time getting there, didn't you?" Delmar asked.

"Yes—so I did—a bully time," and the three laughed heartily as they entered the hotel together.

Guy Morley was greatly astonished when he was told of the capture of Crampton's entire band and the death of the leader.

"Then we will have to appear in court against them," he said.

"Yes," replied Casserly, "and we must make it a point to send every man of them up—at least as many as we can recognize."

"Of course. It will never do to let up on such a vindictive gang as that."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DROWNING CONSCIENCE.

The wholesale arrest of the Crampton gang and the firmness of the leader, even in the pangs of death, created the most intense excitement in the city. The four friends were besieged by the reporters of the city papers and by degrees the whole story came out.

The dissipation of three of the young men also came out with it, and some comments were published which was certainly not pleasant reading for them or their friends. Nevertheless they went before the grand jury and secured the indictment of all the gang, including the mysterious Marguerite, whom nothing could move to confess all she knew in regard to the gang of villains.

She seemed to have a superstitious dread of Crampton's dying threat, and declared she would go to prison or perish on the scaffold before she would say a word to condemn a single member of the gang.

The trials were to come off in three months. The prisoners secured able counsel and preparations went on for a vigorous defense.

The counsel for the prosecution informed the four friends that the defendants had a host of friends who were spending money like water in their efforts to acquit them.

"Their acquittal will be your condemnation in the public mind," he said. "Be careful, therefore, in your conduct, as detectives will be on your track from this time till the trial looking for something damaging to your characters in order to break down your evidence."

"Then we must, indeed, be careful," said Casserly.

"Yes, and above all things keep away from drinking saloons. Men you meet there will swear they heard you say so and so there, and some one on the jury may believe them."

Casserly told the others what the counsel had said, and they resolved to keep away from the bar-rooms until after the trial.

But Harry Delmar said he did not propose to punish himself while trying to punish the rascals, by abstaining from wine entirely.

"We can drink here in our rooms," suggested Brinsley, "and nobody need be the wiser for it."

"Yes," said Casserly, "we can have a bottle of wine in our rooms occasionally."

"Then we'll have a bottle now," and Brinsley rang the bell for a servant.

The bottle of wine was brought in and soon finished.

"We'll have another," said Delmar. "We can afford to celebrate our victory now, fellows."

The second bottle was succeeded by a third, Morley, however, steadily refusing to touch a drop of it.

Delmar laughed at him in his half drunken humor.

"You may laugh as much as you please, Harry," said Guy, nettled by the taunts of the witty Delmar, "but after seeing what wine drinking has cost you, I will never drink another drop as long as I live."

Harry looked at him a minute or so in dumb surprise and then asked:

"Do you know what it has cost me, Guy Morley?"

"Yes—a priceless jewel," he said, "a woman's love."

"True—true," replied Harry, hoarsely. "Wine cost me that, and it shall pay the penalty. Fill up again, fellows. Let care go dance with the devil."

Filling his glass to the brim, he drank it off at a gulp and then burst out into loud laughter.

"Ha-ha-ha! Let the dead past be buried out of sight! Let memory forget in the depth of the wine cup that I was once a sober temperance man, and was beloved by the handsomest woman in the city. What does it all amount to? Give me wine and boon companions, and woman may go to the devil for all I care," and lifting up the half-emptied bottle he held it between his face and the gas jet. "Ha-ha-ha, my sparkling beauty. You cut this woman out, did you? Did her heart break, poor thing? You—you can soothe when all others fail. Come, loving heart, thou solace of sorrow!" and turning it up to his lips, he poured the contents down his throat in a gurgling stream.

"By heavens, Harry!" cried Casserly, "you'll kill yourself! You must not drink so much at a time."

"That's a big dose he has got this time," said Guy Morley, whose face was as pale as death. "If we don't do something with him, he'll be a dead man before morning."

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed Harry, his eyes gleaming with an unnatural light; "let me die if I can. I am not afraid of death—never have been—don't want—hic—to live a thou—hic—sand years nohow."

"But look here, old fellow," said Casserly, in alarm, "can't you just manage to disgorge some of that wine? You've got more than your share, you know."

"No—no—not—hic—er drop," said Harry, reeling and staggering about the room. "Who cares'h for—hic—me? Let—hic—er go—I don't care a shent, nohow," and reeling across the room, he fell across the bed, and lay as still as if clasped in the cold embrace of death.

"Quick, Morley!" cried Casserly, springing to his feet, "summon a doctor with a stomach pump or he'll be dead in an hour!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ACHING HEADS AND VOWS OF REFORM.

Guy Morley lost no time in summoning a physician. On a side street, just two doors below the hotel, was a doctor's residence. He ran around there and rang the bell furiously.

"What's the matter now?" the doctor asked.

"It's a matter of life and death, sir," cried Morley. "Come with me quick, doctor."

The man of medicine was singularly calm and phlegmatic.

"Who is it and where?" he asked, looking over his spectacles at the excited young man.

"Harry Delmar at the hotel around the corner—quick, or he'll die."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Drank a half-gallon of champagne with intention to kill himself," answered Morley. "What the devil are you waiting for?"

"Drunk, eh?" exclaimed the doctor, looking around for his stomach pump. "I guess he ought to die."

"You blasted old mullen head!" exclaimed Guy, completely beside himself. "If you are coming, say so."

"Helloo, young fellow!" returned the doctor, turning suddenly upon him. "You had about a quart yourself, didn't you?"

"No, not a drop," hissed Guy; "but if he dies I'll make you drink a gallon of the same stuff or swallow an ounce of lead."

"Crazy as a loon," muttered the doctor. "Go on, I'm coming."

Guy led the way back to the hotel, swearing all the way because the doctor wouldn't run like the wind.

But the doctor followed him leisurely up the stairs and into Harry's room, when he was shown his patient. He ascertained how much he had taken and then proceeded to put his stomach pump in operation.

He soon emptied Harry's stomach of all the fluids he had drunk, and then administered certain remedies—demanded his fee of five dollars, received it and left.

"That's an eccentric old coon," remarked Casserly, as he shut the door after the doctor; "but I guess he understands his business."

"Yes, he is," said Morley. "I didn't understand him and

called him an old mullen head because he wouldn't come sooner. I'll apologize to him to-morrow."

The three friends sat up all night with Harry and saw that he was out of danger. They didn't tell him of the visit of the doctor.

"Well, old fellow," said Brinsley, "how is your head this morning? pretty full, eh?"

"Yes," sighed Harry, "fuller than my stomach. I feel as hollow as a polkstalk."

Brinsley smiled knowingly, but said nothing about the stomach pump. He looked serious, though, and said, after a long pause:

"I say, Harry, don't you think it would benefit you to swear off as Guy did, and be a good boy after this?"

Harry turned his bloodshot eyes full on him and asked:

"Do you think I need it?"

"Yes—badly. The New York Herald this morning suggests that your immediate friends send you to an inebriate asylum, and——"

"The devil!" exclaimed Harry, his eyes opening to their widest.

"True as preaching," said Brinsley, with a face as solemn as a baboon's. "All the world will see it. Why the deuce can't you go slow and not make an ass of yourself. Sign the pledge and give the Herald the lie."

"No, sir, I'll send my obituary to the Herald, my soul to destruction, and my body to Potter's Field," replied Harry, with an expression of bitterness upon his face that alarmed Brinsley.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the latter, "I thought I would just touch you up a little. You see how you would feel under such circumstances, so swear off, old fellow, and don't drink another drop."

Harry was amazed.

"The Herald didn't say that, then?" he asked.

"No, nor anything else about you," replied Brinsley, laughing.

"That's all right—please ring that bell there."

Brinsley pulled the bell cord and then asked:

"What do you want now, Harry?"

"Breakfast and a bottle of wine."

"Better leave the wine alone, Harry."

"Oh, I must taper off, you know," said Harry, just as a servant entered to take his order.

When the servant retired to bring up the meal, Brinsley again pleaded with him to let the wine alone.

"You will lose your good name and be classed as a drunkard if you do not," he said, earnestly.

"Bob," said Harry, "I have nothing left to live for. All my ambition in life has gone from me. I would rather die than live."

"Oh, you talk like a fool," said Brinsley, impatiently. "Be a man and face life boldly. You have as much to live for as any other man."

"You don't know—you don't know," murmured Harry, as the servant entered with the tray and wine.

"Open the bottle, Ned," he said, to the waiter, "and fill me a glass."

"Ah, I feel better now. Have some, Bob?"

Brinsley well knew that if he didn't drink part of the wine Harry would again drink himself blind drunk, so he took a full glass of it and sat down to watch him.

As may be very readily supposed, Harry was quite ill for several days after the stomach pump adventure, of which Casserly informed him after the second day. But he grew stronger all the time, though swearing he would rather they had let him alone and left him to die.

"Boys," said Casserly to Morley and Brinsley that night, as they were talking about Harry's narrow escape from death, in the smoking-room of the hotel, "we did more than we intended when we inveigled Harry into wine drinking. We have about ruined him. I have been thinking about it for some time. If he goes down any lower I shall never forgive myself. He never touched a drop until we got him drunk that night on 'Sparkling Cider.'"

"That's true," asserted Morley, "and I can say I have truly repented of my part in that affair. It has troubled me not a little. I think we ought all to join the Good Templars, and try to get him to do the same thing."

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed Brinsley.

"It wouldn't hurt you any to join," said Casserly, turning to Brinsley, "nor me, either, for that matter."

"No Good Templars for me," said Brinsley, with an air of determination about him.

"You helped to make a drunkard of Harry," said Morley, "and surely ought to try to save him."

"Yes. I just gave him a good temperance lecture this morning."

"And helped him punish a bottle of wine at the same time,"

added Casserly, who had learned the fact from Harry only the hour before supper.

Brinsley looked confused.

"That kind of lecturing never goes down," said Guy Morley. "We must lead him. He will not be driven or lectured into doing anything. We can save him; we will only stand by him and let liquor alone, and I am willing to do it."

"Of course you are," sneered Brinsley. "You have been living on cold water until you dare not go out into the cold for fear of your insides freezing."

Casserly and Morley both roared with merriment.

"No use, Casserly; Bob is as bad off as Harry. He can no more give up than Harry can."

"Do you want to bet a thousand dollars on that, old fellow?"

"No, I am not willing to give you a thousand dollars to reform," replied Guy; "but I will wager you a suit of clothes."

Brinsley made no reply.

"Better cover that bet, Bob," suggested Casserly.

"I don't know about that. I don't think the clothes would be worth the trouble."

"But you will win your wager, which fact would be something."

"Yes, I will take the bet," and the two men shook hands over the bargain they had made.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TEMPTED AND FALLEN.

"Now, Casserly," said Guy, "you must join in this thing. Bob will lose the clothes unless you also join in and set a good example."

"Yes," added Brinsley. "It must be a cold water gang all through, or a leak will spring somewhere and swamp the whole thing."

"Very well. Let's draw up a pledge and all sign it. Maybe Harry will do so when he sees our names to it."

"That's the idea. I'll draw up a pledge now," and he ran into the gentlemen's parlor to write it.

"Say, old fellow," said Brinsley to Casserly, as soon as they were alone together, "let's have a farewell glass together."

"Good. Come ahead," and they both made their way to the bar-room of the hotel. There they drank several glasses of wine before Morley could find them with the pledge he had drawn up and signed.

Guy was astonished.

They were both drunk—almost, and laughed at him when he presented the pledge to them.

"Just wait until morning, old fellow," said Casserly. "This is a last blow out. Have a glass with us and start new with the gang."

"No, I won't drink a drop," said Guy, with a determined shake of his head.

"Oh, get out! We can all sign in the morning and commence a new life."

"I'll wait till morning," said Guy, placing the paper in his pocket, "and then we can all sign it together."

"That's right, old fellow. Now, have a last drink with us, Guy. You know we'll all swig cold water after this. Here, barkeeper, another bottle of that wine. This is our last carouse. We have been in some tight places, you know, and——"

"Yes, and wine got us into them, too," said Guy, interrupting him.

"Yes—that's so; but we got out, you know, and are going to have a farewell drink together."

Casserly poured out a glass for Guy, and then filled his own, Brinsley filled his, and then all three sat facing each other.

"Come, here's to the end of all the sprees of youth. May the calm judgment that mellows with age forever keep us true to our pledge!"

"By Heavens, I will drink to that toast!" exclaimed Morley, in the enthusiasm of the moment, taking up his glass, and tossing it off in the old-time style.

"Good for you, Guy!" cried Brinsley, setting down his glass, and slapping his chum on the shoulder. "Have another, and let's shake the old thing forever."

"Well, one more, and then we'll quit," said Guy. "It tastes like an old friend, long lost," and as he spoke he held out his glass for Casserly to refill.

This he quaffed more leisurely, and in a few minutes the slumbering embers of the old thirst were rekindling into a fierce blaze. His large, black eyes flashed, and wit sparkled in his conversation. They drank a third, fourth and fifth glass before leaving the table, when all three were gloriously drunk, and had to be shown up to their rooms.

Harry Delmar lay on his sick bed in his room wondering

what had become of his three friends. He knew nothing of the proposed reformation that had been mapped out for him in the midst of a debauch.

When morning came, it found Guy Morley with a raging, consuming thirst, and a swollen head that was simply awful to see.

Harry rang his bell, and asked the waiter to see what had become of Casserly, Brinsley and Morley.

"They were all pretty full last night, sir," said the waiter.

"Pretty full! What do you mean? They were not drunk, were they?"

"I did not say that, sir," replied the cautious waiter, "but they were pretty full, I know."

Harry gave a prolonged whistle, and lay back on his pillow, and gave himself up to a train of thought he had not recently indulged in.

"Tell them to come in here when you see them," he said to the waiter, slipping a coin into his hand.

Guy was bathing his head with cold water when Brinsley entered his room.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "does your hair pull, old fellow?"

"Awfully!" said Guy, "and feels as though it will burst."

"So does mine. I've ordered a bottle to be brought in here. Eugene will be in, and then we'll straighten out our hair and sign that pledge."

"I think our heads would have been clearer this morning had we signed it last night," said Guy, reflectively.

"No doubt of that—no doubt of that. But our hair pulls, and we must remedy it—ah, here comes Eugene and the wine."

Casserly entered with a bottle of wine, and proceeded to open it. Guy made up his mind not to touch it, but when the cork flew out his good resolution went with it, and he eagerly seized a glass of the sparkling wine and drank it.

"Ah!" he muttered, as he set down the glass; "that opens the eyes and combs the tangles."

"Yes, indeed," assented Brinsley, following his example with another glass. Casserly joined in the pastime, and soon the bottle was emptied.

Of course they felt better after that, but the wine on empty stomachs soon had its full effect. All three staggered into Harry Delmar's room about half seas over.

Harry was utterly astonished at Morley's condition, and asked:

"How can these things be?"

"Oh, we are all going to sign the pledge," said Guy, "and are just having a farewell pop at the bottle."

"That's a queer way of signing the pledge. But I'll get up and sign with you, if that's the way you do it," and Harry arose, feeble as he was, dressed himself, and rang for another bottle of wine.

When it came, they all four joined in to do justice to it.

"This looks like old times—all united around one common altar again," said Brinsley, smiling, as he gazed around at the flushed faces of his companions.

"Yes; old—old times are come again," remarked Guy, refilling his glass. "But the confounded stuff tastes better than it ever did. I hate to give it up again."

CHAPTER XXX.

"I AM DYING."

The result of the bottle in Harry Delmar's room before breakfast that morning was, all four were drunk before the first meal of the day was ready. Guests of the house who knew Guy Morley as a strict temperance man, were utterly astonished at his wild drinking that morning.

The carouse was kept up, each man vowing that after that they were going to swear off and sign the pledge of total abstinence.

But the day passed and they were drunker than ever. Harry Delmar had to be carried insensible to his room, and the others were helped to theirs.

The next day the burning thirst called for more drink, and they had it in copious quantities. The same scenes of the previous day were enacted—only with more dramatic effect.

Harry Delmar had an attack of delirium tremens in the bar-room of the hotel.

His first symptoms was the throwing of a glass full of liquor on the floor, with:

"The snake! Did you see it?"

"No—where?" cried one of the many young men, lounging about there.

"There—there on the floor!" cried Harry, his eyes almost popping out of his head. "God, how it grows! Look! I grows as large as my arm. Ugh! Take it away! Take it off! Help—help! Ugh—o-o-oh! Shake it off—ha-ha-ha-ha!"

and a wild demoniacal laugh escaped him and rang out even upon the street.

"He's got 'em," said the barkeeper, "got 'em bad, sure!"

The wild laugh, screeches of terror, supplications for help and fierce ravings filled the hotel. He was seized and forcibly carried to his room by others, and the brusque old physician sent for again.

He came, and saw that it was a bad case, and at once gave directions for vigorous treatment.

Casserly and the other two were slightly alarmed, but they drank steadily, to quiet their nerves, they said. They kept up the debauch all through the night, and toward day light wandered out to greet the cold morning air, which their fevered frames enjoyed intensely.

They wandered down toward the river, and near the Hunson entered one of those dangerous dens that are kept open all night, and ordered champagne.

Champagne was a drink unknown in that den of vice. So, also, were well-dressed men like they were.

The midnight thieves, who had crept in, glared at them in surprise, and eyed their watch chains with hungry eagerness.

"No champagne here," growled the barkeeper; "whisky, brandy, rum and gin's all we have."

"Give us brandy, then," said Casserly, who was beginning to feel the chill of the early morning air.

They drank and paid for the brandy, and then turned to leave.

Just as Casserly reached the door a burly thief snatched his watch chain and tore it from the vest, carrying the watch with it.

Casserly was too drunk at first to know what had happened. But when he saw the fellow running away, he involuntarily put his hand to his vest and missed his watch and chain.

"Stop thief!" he yelled, at the top of his voice, and started in pursuit of the thief.

Guy Morley dashed after him, as did Brinsley. But Guy, being too full of liquor to make much speed, was left behind within half a block of the thieves' den.

Suddenly he felt a stunning blow from behind and a sharp pain in the side.

He was stabbed.

He staggered forward and fell to the pavement. Two villainous-looking men turned him over and divested him of watch, purse and rings in a twinkling.

The next moment Guy Morley became unconscious, and all was black chaos to him.

When he came to he found himself in a strange place, with several anxious faces bending over him. They were strange faces to him, and he asked in a feebleness of voice that surprised him:

"Where am I?"

"In Bellevue Hospital," replied a man who was standing over him. "I am the surgeon in charge. You are badly hurt. What is your name?"

"Guy Morley," he replied.

"Where do you live?"

"At ——— Hotel, on Broadway."

A messenger was at once dispatched to the hotel to ascertain the fact. Word was sent back that caused the surgeon to give him every attention.

Casserly and Brinsley were still missing, and detectives were sent out to hunt them up. They were found wandering down by the river, robbed of all their valuables, and utterly unconscious of their condition or locality.

They were carried back to the hotel, sobered up, and then taken to the hospital to see Guy.

His pale face and generally altered appearance, as he lay there on the cot, alarmed them.

"My God, Guy!" exclaimed Casserly, "how did this happen?"

"Stabbed and robbed," he said in a whisper, for he was growing weaker every moment.

"We were robbed, too," said Brinsley, "but not hurt. I am so sorry you are hurt. Is it a very bad hurt?"

"Yes—I am dying," said Guy.

"No—no!" they both cried. "Not dying! Is he dying, doctor?"

"I think he is—or at least he cannot live very long—not another day."

Both young men dropped down on their knees by the side of the bed, and buried their faces in the bedclothes.

"Doctor," said Guy, very feebly, "send a carriage to No.—on ——— street, for Miss Madge Ellington. I would see her before I die. Tell her that if she would see Guy Morley breathe his last, to come quickly."

The surgeon hastened to give the order, sending a trusty messenger with the carriage. He then returned to the dying man to watch the progress of his case.

A half hour had scarcely passed when a carriage stopped at the gate of the hospital. A young lady with pallid face sprang out, and ran up the steps.

It was Madge Ellington, come in response to Guy Morley's summons.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GUY MORLEY DIES—"HOLD MY HEAD, MADGE! I CANNOT SEE YOU!"

When Madge Ellington entered the room in which the wounded man lay, her face wore an expression of mingled surprise and fear.

The surgeon in charge met and escorted her to the cot. Her eyes met those of Eugene Casserly and Robert Brinsley, and a hasty recognition passed between them.

But her eyes were instantly fastened on the face of Guy Morley.

"Oh, Mr. Morley!" she exclaimed, dropping into a chair by the side of the cot. "What in the world does this mean?"

"It means that I am dying, Madge Ellington," replied the wounded man.

"How did you get hurt?" she asked, her pretty face betraying all the tender sympathy of her womanly nature.

"I have been stabbed. Liquor did it all. I broke my pledge because you had broken my heart."

Madge Ellington's face grew ashen pale, and her lips refused to speak for several moments.

"I loved you better than my life, Madge," continued Guy, after an effort, "and plotted and conspired to win you even when I knew you loved another."

The surgeon here arose to his feet, and beckoned Casserly and Brinsley to follow him. They did so, and the dying man was left alone with the woman he loved.

Madge had buried her face in her hands. Guy took her hand in his, and said:

"You will forgive me, Madge? I shall soon be in another world."

"What shall I forgive, Mr. Morley? You have never done me any harm, and if you have, I fully, freely forgive you everything."

"You don't know how happy your words make me, Madge. I have harmed you more than you think. I am growing weaker every moment. The cold hand of death is upon me. I will tell you all now. I loved you, Madge—wildly loved you, and thought only of winning you for my bride. But I soon saw that you loved another, and that he was my friend and companion, Harry Delmar—no—no, don't shake your head, Madge, and show that look of pain in your face. Harry was in every way worthy of your love. I saw that unless I could make him forfeit your esteem I could have no chance of winning you for myself. So I plotted and brought about the scene on that eventful night when he drank his first glass of wine, and—"

"Guy Morley!" exclaimed Madge Ellington, springing to her feet, and grasping the hand of the dying man in hers, "as you are soon to stand in the presence of your God, tell me if you are speaking the truth."

"May God deal with me as I am dealing with you, Madge," said Guy. "Sit down and listen while I yet have the strength to speak. Harry Delmar did not know that he was drinking wine that night. We assured him that it was harmless cider. He believed us and drank till he was drunk—so drunk as to be utterly unconscious of what he was doing. He sang and shouted like a drunken man, and finally knocked down the landlord. We carried him to his room and took care of him till morning. When his sober senses returned a burning fever came also. He knew he had forever forfeited your esteem. When he learned that you had not sent him any kind message during his illness he lost hope and plunged deeper into the stupefying depths of the wine cup, caring for nothing, hoping only that death might come and suddenly claim him."

Madge Ellington fell on her knees and buried her face in the bed-clothes, crying convulsively.

"Poor Harry—poor Harry—my darling Harry!"

"He is trying to kill himself now, Madge, and you alone can save him. Assure him only of your love, and he will break the chain that now holds him. He loves you still—worships your picture, and—"

"Oh, my poor Harry—my poor Harry!" moaned Madge.

"Do you forgive me now, Madge? Tell me now, do you forgive me?"

"Yes—yes—a thousand times yes, Guy Morley! You have given me back my love from its tomb of ashes. I know now what I knew not before. I thought him unworthy, for, Guy, I was in the hotel that night and heard him use my name in that drinking song. I went away with my heart dead within my bosom. Oh, how I shall bless your name for this confession! May God forgive you as I do. May He cover you with His mercy and save you beyond the grave!"

"Amen! I can now die content," said Guy. "Only see that Harry does not execrate my memory. For you I would have sold my soul to Satan, Madge Ellington!"

"Harry will forgive you as freely as I do."

"You will reclaim him, Madge, and save him from the consequences of his first glass?"

"Yes, Guy, or perish with him!" was the heroic reply.

"God bless you, Madge! God bless you and Harry! May you both be happy, and—and—water—I—thirst!"

Madge seized the glass of water on the little stand by the head of the bed, and held it to his lips. He drank a sip, and then reached up, as if feeling for her.

"Where are you, Madge?" he asked. "It is growing dark. I cannot see you. Hold my hand—don't let go—hold me fast. I am sinking down—down—down, Madge! Oh, how dark and cold it is! Where are you, Madge? Speak to me, Madge!"

"Guy, I am with you—Madge Ellington—do you know me, Guy?"

"Yes, I hear your voice. I can't see—it is—so dark!"

"You are in the valley of the shadow of death, Guy. The light and the shining river are just beyond; don't you see the light now, Guy? The angels of God will meet you at the river!"

"How dark it is—hold my hand, Madge. Ugh! the water is so cold! Ugh—oh!" and with a gasp he yielded up the ghost.

Madge gave a piercing shriek when she saw that he was dead, and fell fainting to the floor by the side of the bed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SACRED PLEDGE.

When Madge's shriek rang through the hospital the surgeon ran forward, followed by Casserly and Brinsley, and raised her unconscious form from the floor and bore it to a lounge in another room.

"Guy is dead, Bob," whispered Casserly to his companion, the tears streaming down his face.

"Yes—poor Guy is gone," murmured Brinsley. "Oh, Eugene! I cannot help thinking that our drinking was the cause of all this?"

Eugene Casserly gazed at the face of his dead friend as if trying to recall all the past. Brinsley grasped the cold hand of the dead man in his, and said:

"Good-by, dear friend. May we meet in the better world. I pledge my sacred word of honor to your poor, cold clay, to never drink another glass of anything that can intoxicate! Ugh! my God!"

"What's the matter?" Casserly asked, leaning forward.

"That cold, clammy hand returned the pressure of mine when I gave that promise!" said Robert Brinsley, his face as white as a sheet.

"Maybe he is not dead!" and Casserly placed his hand on his heart.

But that young heart was still forever. It would never throb again.

"Poor Guy!" he murmured, and the two turned away to follow the surgeon and Madge Ellington.

They found the surgeon administering restoratives and stood by ready to render any assistance that might be needed. In a few minutes she recovered sufficiently to recognize them.

"You feel better now, Miss Ellington?" Casserly asked, leaning over her.

"Yes—yes, poor Guy!" she moaned the tears streaming down her face.

"Please excuse me now," said the surgeon. "My duties call me away, but I will return soon," and with that he bowed himself out and returned to where the dead body of Guy Morley lay, and crossed the hands over the breast.

Madge raised herself on her elbow, and looked up at Casserly and Brinsley. Tears were coursing down their cheeks.

"Mr. Casserly," she said, "look me straight in the face and tell me what killed Guy Morley."

The question startled Eugene Casserly, and he nearly lost

his self-possession. Her great, luminous eyes were riveted on his face. The answer flashed through his brain in an instant. "Wine killed him, Miss Ellington," he replied in a hoarse whisper.

"That is what he said," she added, "and said further, that it was killing Harry Delmar."

"So it is," assented Brinsley.

"And is it not also killing you, Mr. Brinsley?" she asked, quickly, turning her tear-stained face to his.

"No!" was the emphatic reply, "for I took the cold hand of Guy Morley just now and pledged him my honor that not another drop shall ever pass my lips."

"Ah, thank God for that!" cried Madge, clasping her hands and bursting into a fresh flood of tears, "for now my task will be easier. I promised Guy that I would save Harry Delmar. You, his two friends, will aid me, will you not?"

"Yes—yes!" they both replied, in a breath.

Casserly held up his right hand and said:

"Swear me now, Miss Ellington, if you please."

She sprang to her feet, and held her own pretty, jeweled hand above her head.

"We will swear together!" she exclaimed. "Hold up your hand, too, Mr. Brinsley."

Robert Brinsley stood by her side and held his hand above his head while she spoke:

"We promise in the presence of God and each other never to drink, as a beverage, anything that can intoxicate."

Brinsley and Casserly repeated her words in clear, distinct tones, and when they finished exclaimed:

"So help me God!"

"Amen!" she fervently ejaculated, as she sank down on the sofa again.

"Where is Harry Delmar?" she asked.

"At the hotel."

"Is he sober to-day?"

"No—drinking hard."

"You must manage to get him sober and then send me word. I will then see him and plead with him. You will see to poor Guy's funeral, of course?"

"Yes. I have telegraphed to his father. He will be here this afternoon."

"I will send flowers," and she rose to go back to the carriage.

Just then the surgeon came in and pronounced her well enough to go. She thanked him for his kindness, and then leaning on the arms of both the young men, passed out to the carriage which was still in waiting.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LOVERS—CONCLUSION.

We leave the dead man with his sorrowing relatives, and return to the living, who now demand attention.

Casserly and Brinsley repaired to their hotel, sadder and wiser men, and began to prevail on Harry Delmar to cease drinking.

"Did you know Guy was dead, Harry?" Casserly asked.

Harry looked up at the serious, tearful face of his friend, and asked:

"Whizzer mat—hic—him?"

"He was stabbed last night—or this morning, rather, and died in the hospital two hours ago."

The news, drunk as he was, shocked him.

"Come up to your room, Harry," said Brinsley, taking him by the arm. "Guy left a message for you, but you must be sober when you hear it."

Guy and Delmar had been old chums for many years. His death touched Harry deeply. He suffered them to lead him up to his room, where he threw himself on his bed, and cried like a child.

They remained with him through the night. At early dawn he arose, and wanted a bottle of wine.

"No, Harry," said Casserly, "we will never drink another drop of any kind of liquor. We swore to that over the dead body of Guy Morley, and we are going to keep it. Wine killed poor Guy."

"I wish to God it would kill me," said Harry, with intense bitterness in his tones. "I must have some wine."

"See here, Harry Delmar," said Eugene, with great firmness, "a lady is coming here to-day, and you have got to see her like a gentleman—not like a comm^{it} drunkard!"

Harry looked astonished.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Madge Ellington," replied Casserly.

Harry staggered back as if stricken a terrible blow.

"I—I won't see her!" he gasped. "She will only lecture me!"

"No—no, Harry. She has wronged you, and is coming to plead for your forgiveness. She is a true woman, Harry, and you shall treat her like a lady. Sober up—get shaved, and dress up in your own style as when you won her heart. She loves you still, Harry, and you can have her if you are man enough to win her!"

These words electrified Harry Delmar. He rang the bell with a vigor that startled the clerk down-stairs.

"Bring me a cup of strong coffee," he said to the servant who responded to the bell.

Casserly grasped his hand, and exclaimed:

"That's it—fight it like a man. Bring three cups, waiter."

The three friends then sat and conversed till the coffee came. Brinsley related the particulars of Guy Morley's death, and the visit of Madge Ellington. Harry was deeply interested.

"Did she say she was coming to see me?" he asked.

"Yes, she did. She will be here early in the afternoon, and you must be in good trim to see her."

"I will—I will," he said, as he drank the cup of strong coffee.

Hope sprang up anew in his breast, and his love burned brightly for the only woman he had ever loved.

After taking a bath and being shaved, he dressed in his best suit of clothes, and waited in the parlor of the hotel for the coming of Madge Ellington. He did not seem like the same man, so great was the change in him.

Casserly sent for Madge and she came quickly.

"He is in the parlor alone, waiting for you," whispered Casserly.

She ran forward and dashed into the room with the glad cry of:

"Harry! dear Harry!"

"Madge, my darling!" and she rushed into his open arms and was folded to his heart.

For nearly five minutes not a word was spoken. They communed with their own hearts in each other's arms. They were too full for words.

Suddenly Harry broke the silence.

"Madge, do you forgive me?"

"Harry, I love you. Love forgives everything."

He pressed her to his heart again and kissed her.

"And I love you, Madge, better than my own soul."

"Better than wine, Harry?" she asked, looking up into his face.

"Yes, Madge, and you must let me prove it. I drank my first glass unwillingly. I have taken my last drink now. Will you trust me, Madge?"

"Yes, Harry, for you were more sinned against than sinning. I know all now. I did not know when I spoke so cruelly to you that you were not to blame."

"I will be true to you, Madge. Your love will keep me safe from all temptation."

They sat down and conversed a long time together, never so happy in their lives as then.

She finally went away, leaving him with Casserly and Brinsley. They all had a terrible thirst to overcome. It raged and burned with savage fierceness, and they were forced to call on a physician for some kind of an antidote. He gave them cinchona, and on that they passed through the day without drinking any alcohol.

The night of the next day found all three of them at the Ellington mansion. Madge received them right royally, and strong coffee was set before them. Harry was nervous and shaky, but the trusting love of Madge kept him up.

Weeks passed, and they succeeded in overcoming their thirst for strong drink. Madge was the happiest of women, and Harry would have suffered death ere he would touch a drop of the stuff that had come so near wrecking his happiness.

A year passed, and the three friends met again in the elegant mansion of the Ellingtons. A bride stood by the side of Harry Delmar. They were pronounced man and wife by the man of God—and so ends our story.

THE END.

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